

America



APRIL 27, 2020

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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A photograph of Pope Francis standing at a wooden podium in St. Peter's Square, Rome. He is wearing white papal vestments and holding a book. Behind him is the illuminated facade of St. Peter's Basilica at night. The scene is lit with warm, golden light from the building's windows and the podium's lights.

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America

Crisis and Opportunity

Earlier this month, for the first time in 111 years, America Media produced and shipped **America** magazine while all of our staff were working remotely. This was possible because we recently instituted an all-digital production process—a multiyear project to move the organization from paper to screen and from print-first to digital-first.

Your support made that work possible. You are the reason we are able to continue to bring you our coverage of the church and the world in these pages and every single day at americamagazine.org.

Our dedicated staff is working harder than ever to provide the news, analysis and spiritual resources you need. As I write this, the editorial and business departments are shifting priorities and resources to respond to the Covid-19 crisis. And as you might imagine, delivering that coverage to you from many time zones and across multiple content platforms while we are locked down along with the rest of the world is no easy feat. **America's** staff is the smartest, hardest-working team in publishing. Thank you for your support of them.

I also want to make sure that you know about all the resources we have marshaled for you in response to this event. Our editors and producers are creating content about this emergency every day on every platform, from print to podcasts, social media and video. News, analysis, reflections—you can find all of that content in one place: americamagazine.org/coronavirus.

In the coming days, many of you will receive our spring appeal letter. As you know, the annual America Appeal is a major source of support for our work. The appeal is planned weeks, if

not months, in advance and the letter you will receive was sent to the printer before the coronavirus crisis began. I ask you to bear that in mind when you receive it.

I also ask that you carefully consider supporting our annual appeal. I know that this is an anxious and challenging time for all of us, and that you face many pressures on many fronts. Please consider our request to the extent your circumstances permit.

When I began my tenure as editor in chief in 2012, I wrote in these pages about the existential threats facing the media business generally and the Catholic press in particular. “While **America's** mission remains constant,” I wrote, “the challenges we face today are unprecedented. It is no secret that the vanguard of the digital revolution has toppled the ancien régime: Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report, once rightly regarded as the Ford and Chrysler of news magazines, have virtually disappeared.”

Today, it is still the case, as I wrote then, that “**America** will not meet a similar fate.... For a variety of reasons, **America** is better positioned than most to meet the challenges of the digital age; we also have a talented staff and the most loyal readers in publishing.” Today, our financial foundation is strong and we have worked successfully over the last several years to transform America Media into a truly digital-first, multi-platform organization.

Such is not the case for every media company. I regret to say that in the weeks and months ahead, you will likely read reports about the demise or dramatic downsizing of both secular and religious media companies. As I said, America Media will not be among

them. Nevertheless, the news will be unwelcome, foremost because it will involve a great deal of heartbreak and economic distress for our colleagues throughout the media industry.

At the same time, the editors and staff of **America** must continue not only to produce the excellent and groundbreaking content that you have come to rely on, but to think through the consequences of these tectonic shifts, both for our industry and for the future of our own work. There are always better, smarter ways to create and deliver our content, and we must seek them out. If America Media, moreover, is going to be one of just a few organizations with a chair when the music stops, we need to make sure that we are doing everything in our power to provide the best service to the largest possible audience.

During a recent meeting, I reminded our staff that all crises, as painful as they often are, also present an opportunity. When our routines and familiar patterns are disrupted, it is certainly destabilizing, even dispiriting; but it is also an opportunity to examine who we are, what we do and how we do it in new ways, from a new perspective. This is the work before us.

St. Ignatius believed that every event, for good or ill, has within it the power to call forth from us a deeper response to God and to one another. This is our faith, too. It is the faith of an Easter people; a people who recognize that Good Friday contains the seeds that bloom on Easter Sunday.

Matt Malone, S.J.
Twitter: [@americameditor](https://twitter.com/americameditor).



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CNS photo/Vatican Media

Pope Francis delivers his Easter message "Urbi et Orbi" after celebrating Easter Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, April 12.

Cover: Military officers stand outside Milan's cathedral, closed by authorities because of the coronavirus outbreak, Feb. 24. (CNS photo/Flavio Lo Scalzo, Reuters)

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How has your family adapted to schooling at home?

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, schools across the United States have moved from classroom learning to at-home or online instruction. We surveyed parents to see how their families have adapted to schooling at home. Of those who responded to our survey, the majority reported having children who attend a private Catholic school.

Still adapting. [We have] two children (second grade and 4-year-old kindergarten) enrolled at our local Catholic school. Both my wife and I have full-time jobs. I am a researcher, and my wife teaches middle school. The teachers have been amazing in how they've reached out. All things considered, it is going O.K., but the lack of social interaction with friends and family is wearing on us.

John Bowser

Beaver Dam, Wis.

Great! We're making the most of our time together at home. Our children attend Catholic high school and grade school, and I've been impressed by the dedication and creativity of the teachers. Their schools used iPads and Google classroom for learning and homework already, so it was an easy transition for them. As a mother of five whose oldest is heading to college next year, I view this time together at home without our usual extracurricular commitments as a gift.

Amy Glenane

Orange, Calif.

It's been tough. We have four children between the ages of 1 and 11—three in a Catholic elementary (kindergarten, second grade and fifth grade) and another in day care—that are now home with us. My husband and I both teach theology in Catholic high schools. All together we are trying to balance work with very different needs among our children. We tried working in shifts, one person on the job, another with the kids. But in order to teach our children and deal with any learning and emotional issues that arise, we really need both of us on task. Now, we are each teaching our children and toggling between work at the same time. My husband and I are really making a concerted effort to communicate needs and seek balance for all of us. We are fortunate to have supportive communities that understand the difficulty of these times.

Christine Hernandez

Sugar Land, Tex.

It's been gradual. At first, the schools assigned work to be done on the children's own time, but there have lately been times when they needed to sign on to Google classroom or Zoom. Teachers are assigning more work than my students feel like completing, but teachers have been very forgiving and chalking it up to unstable home conditions.

Teresa Skelton

Freehold, N.J.

Quite well. Surprisingly well. My fifth grader has thrived on the independence and responsibility of tracking his day. My eighth grader misses her friends and all the eighth grade celebrations before high school. Online school may actually be the antidote to "senioritis" (or "eighth-grade-itis") because she misses her friends and the social parts of school so much that she wants to go online and "see" them.

Meghan Roddy

Houston, Tex.

We were homeschooling using a Catholic curriculum for the last five years. We are keeping up with our usual school lessons to allow dad the quiet to work from home and so that we will have time to go have fun when things open up again. All of our extracurricular activities have stopped for a time, but some are starting to set up online options. I set up a Facebook page called "Temporary Homeschooling 2020" to give brick and mortar school parents access to homeschooling parents who can offer support. I feel for them. We are doing so well because we have had years to establish our structures and routines. These parents got thrown into this with little to no background. Most of what we do is offer emotional and rallying support.

Sara Giorgis

Silver Spring, Md.

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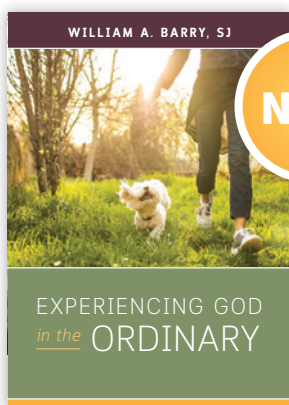
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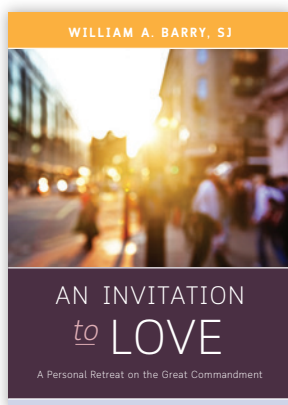


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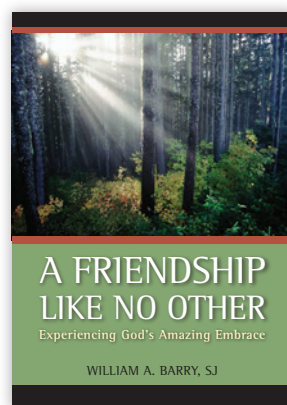
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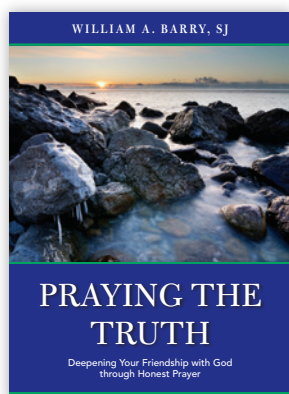
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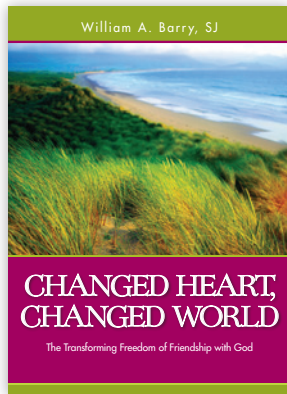
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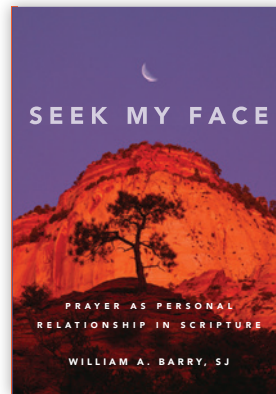
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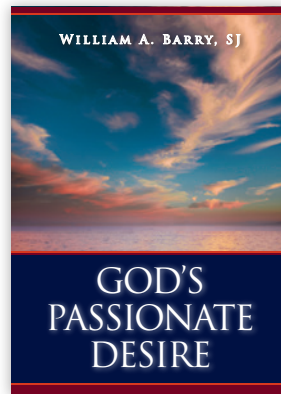
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Pandemics Do Not Erase Inequities

The coronavirus pandemic is a shared experience for all inhabitants of the world, but it is not the same experience for all.

Andrew Cuomo, the governor of New York, called Covid-19 “the great equalizer” in a tweet on March 31; and he is correct that illness and death do not, in the end, respect power and privilege. This does not mean that social inequities no longer matter. In the influenza pandemic of 1918, death rates were much higher for those in poorer, more crowded neighborhoods, and there is already evidence that the coronavirus is spreading more quickly among low-income households and among African-Americans in particular.

For some Americans, the most difficult aspects of the pandemic are cabin fever and becoming accustomed to social distancing, a phrase with decidedly un-Christian connotations. For many millions of other Americans, complete social distancing is not an option. Health care workers must remain on the front lines fighting the virus, and public safety officials must be as vigilant as ever. Grocery and drug-store employees, as well as delivery workers in trucks or on bicycles, are still on the job, having to spend much of their time cleaning everything they or their customers touch.

These and other essential workers are concentrated in poorer neighborhoods, and The New York Times recently reported that although subway ridership overall in the nation’s biggest city was down 87 percent, it was down by only about half in certain stations used by low-income workers. Working from home is simply not an option for most of the people who are fortunate enough to remain employed.

Many of these essential workers have young children and cannot devote several hours a day to home-schooling or making sure that their children keep up with their peers. Children who cannot be left unattended may be sent to friends’ or relatives’ homes during the workday, increasing the risk of spreading the virus.

Millions of other Americans live in group settings where they have little or no control over how many people are in close proximity to them. First, there are 1.5 million residents in nursing facilities, like the residence in Washington State where dozens died of the coronavirus in one of the earliest outbreaks in the United States. Not to mention the more than two million people in correctional facilities at any given time, and the 200,000 people who flow in and out of jails every week.

In addition, about 1.3 million people are active-duty military personnel, many in crowded conditions like those on the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt, whose captain was fired after writing simultaneously to multiple superiors with a warning that the virus was spreading through his crew.

Then there are the half-million homeless people in the United States who must take their chances in overcrowded soup kitchens and shelters.

The coronavirus is also an omnipresent threat to the thousands of asylum seekers and other migrants stranded in detention centers and in makeshift camps on the other side of the U.S.-Mexico border. Within the United States, undocumented migrants have good reason to fear seeking health care and risking deportation. Recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, many of whom work in health care, must worry

about both the pandemic and the future of their legal status.

Other groups have added difficulties in accessing health care and even getting accurate information about the pandemic, including those without internet access and non-English speakers. People with disabilities fear discrimination if they need medical care, especially if the specter of “rationing” arises. Americans who are losing employer-sponsored health insurance because their jobs have vanished—a group that grew by 3.5 million in just two weeks, by one estimate—fear falling through the cracks if they need immediate medical attention.

The intent here is not to mock those who are trying to make the best of quarantine and social distancing, whether by spending more time with family, learning how to bake bread or trying to emulate Shakespeare, who supposedly passed the time in quarantine from the plague by writing “King Lear.” But most people cannot approach the coronavirus as an opportunity for reflection or self-improvement.

Praise God if your family gets through this, but do not presume that everyone is as fortunate or that the pandemic is over when some of us are able to take tentative steps toward normal life. Remember what Arturo Sosa, S.J., the superior general of the Society of Jesus, recently said about the crisis: “We are one humanity.... Each and every one of us is part of it; no one is left out; no one of us can do without the others.”

The Shepherds Have Not Abandoned Their Flocks

“There was a real sense of a heavy weight on my shoulders,” Bishop John Stowe of Lexington, Ky., said on **America’s** podcast “Jesuitical” of his decision to suspend public Masses on March 17 to help slow the spread of the coronavirus. “I am depriving all of the people of God in this diocese of access to the sacraments, which I preach day in and day out is so vital to our life as Catholics.” Two months ago, no bishop could have imagined telling the faithful to stay home on Sunday, to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord without the Eucharist. Yet from Lexington to Houston, Seattle to New York, the heads of dioceses and archdioceses last month swiftly canceled Masses and other gatherings that might put lives at risk. They should be commended for making this sacrifice for the common good despite the grave human and financial costs.

And while the doors of our churches are closed for now, the shepherds have not abandoned their flocks. Bishops, priests and lay associates have scrambled to get the technology needed to live-stream Masses and prayer services; parishes have provided online resources to help families; and children and young adults have “adopted” elderly members who might not check email and call them just to chat or pray together. As Catholics, we will continue to hunger for the sacraments. But these examples of creativity and care from our church can inspire us to see the holiness of everyday life, to build up our own domestic churches and to be Christ to one another in this time of longing.

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Learning to preserve our humanity in a pandemic

As we live through the coronavirus pandemic, we understand that social distancing and quarantine are essential for avoiding worst-case scenarios. But social distancing is also highlighting the importance of social connection and what happens when this part of who we are is taken away.

“Taken away” might not be the right way of phrasing it. That connotes that we lack agency in whatever is happening to us. Instead, we might ask what happens when some of our usual social connections are given away. By this, I mean when we freely decide that there is some greater good we hope to achieve, and that changing how we live together is the best way to achieve it. It is similar to how a married couple does not have their freedom to date other people taken away; they freely give away that freedom for the sake of something greater. As someone who loves college basketball, I initially felt that March Madness was taken away from me, but with a little bit of distance (pun intended) we might gain the freedom to actually give such things away.

Nevertheless, there are great risks in giving away the practices with which we typically find community and companionship. We must not allow this virus to rob us of our humanity.

So how can we achieve social distance without experiencing social isolation? How can we behave with an appropriate amount of caution without falling into fear? How do we respect the virus without giving it too much power?

Part of the answer is in ensuring that as we temporarily place greater physical distance between ourselves, we consider creative ways to replace that physical contact. For every hug

or handshake we forgo, we might offer some words of love and affirmation. For every visit we are unable to make, we could place an extra phone call or video call. For every bar, restaurant or concert we avoid, we could take that time to join an online book club, plan a garden or send something good into the world via Facebook or Twitter. Another strategy is to identify one or two others as your exclusive social outlets. If each person in those small social circles adhere to a promise that they are each other’s exclusive social companions during this time, it can achieve great good with little additional risk.

Even more fundamental than these practical strategies is how we choose to view the other person during this time. This is admittedly difficult when dealing with an infectious disease because the other person is a potential threat. Yet we can choose whether we see that person first as a threat or first as someone else who is vulnerable to the same disease that we are. Is our lens difference and competition, or is it shared identity and solidarity? We cannot let the idea of others as a threat become their fundamental identity. Doing so not only tears at their humanity; it also tears at ours.

Ultimately, we belong to each other—even, and perhaps especially, during a pandemic like this. Many in our society are particularly vulnerable during times of social distancing: those in nursing homes, who are immunocompromised and who are incarcerated. We must ensure that these and other groups are not further isolated because of this disease. For those concerned that sacraments and other activities of our faith life have been temporarily curtailed, perhaps

we should give ourselves over to this significant spiritual task.

In public health, we often use some variation of “before, everything you do for a disaster seems alarmist, and after everything seems inadequate.” That is the nature of the work. As we consider both the practical and existential dimensions of this pandemic we might consider what came before it.

How have we allowed ourselves to be distanced from each other even before this disease? Why have we let the narrative of competition become such a presumed part of our society?

We must also consider what comes after the virus is under control. How can what we do in the coming weeks bring us closer together and make us more compassionate for those on society’s margins? How might we increase our belonging to each other, whether or not we are faced with a pandemic?

These are not theoretical questions. They have always been there, but we can see them more clearly at the moment. The virus is simply doing what viruses do. It is time for us to do what we do. That is, to be more human than before, trusting that in so doing we are better prepared for this threat and any others that will one day come.

Michael Rozier, S.J., is an assistant professor of health management and policy and health care ethics at Saint Louis University, in Missouri.

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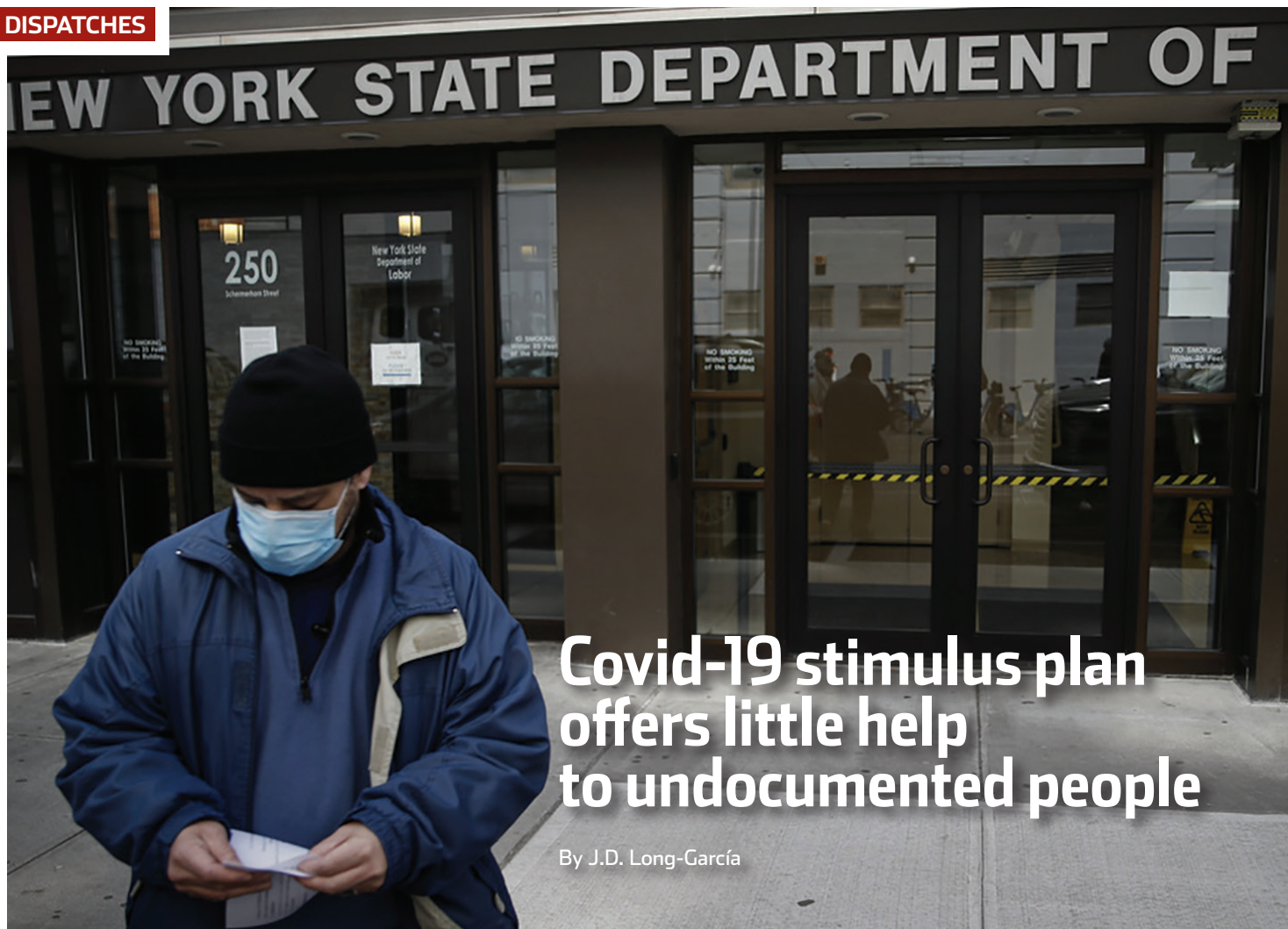
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Covid-19 stimulus plan offers little help to undocumented people

By J.D. Long-García

At the end of March, Margarita Aguila lost her full-time job as a seamstress. At the same time, her husband, who worked as a delivery driver, saw his hours cut drastically. When California implemented stay-at-home measures to respond to the coronavirus threat, the family lost their income completely.

“It’s a bit difficult, but God will provide,” said Ms. Aguila, a parishioner at St. Rose of Lima in Maywood, Calif. She stays home with her three children and does her best to continue their online learning.

Ms. Aguila and her husband are undocumented immigrants, but their children are U.S. citizens. If the children catch the coronavirus, she said, they will have health care. But for her husband and herself, Ms. Aguila said their only plan is just to not get sick.

“I don’t want to get ahead of myself,” she said. “I’m just maintaining my faith in God.”

Every day, she watches Mass and prays the rosary with her pastor online. The Rev. Dario Miranda broadcasts dai-

ly Mass, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. He keeps up with around 1,000 parishioners, most of whom are Spanish-speaking, using a church-oriented messaging system called Flocknote.

“There’s a lot of suffering in this community,” Father Miranda said, adding that it has been a challenge to stay in touch with parishioners since the church is closed. “For the immigrant community, Mass is a big part of their identity. It’s how they get through the challenges of life.”

Faith, work and health care are among the top concerns in the immigrant community, according to faith leaders across the country. The federal government’s \$2 trillion stimulus plan, which allots \$500 billion to corporations, has done little to address concerns about all three among St. Rose’s parishioners.

“While millions of U.S. citizens will be receiving one-time checks or unemployment for the next several months, this stimulus package is utterly disappointing to the millions of tax-paying undocumented immigrants who are



Outside a Department of Labor office in New York on March 18 as applications for jobless benefits surge across the nation.

left out,” said Michael Nicolás Okińczyc-Cruz, the executive director of the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership.

“In Chicago, as in communities across the country, many Latinx families have been financially devastated by the economic reverberations of the pandemic,” he said. “Locally we see this continuing to deepen the feeling of anxiety and fear that many immigrant families face on a daily basis.”

Health care is a concern to both undocumented immigrants and legal residents, Mr. Cabrera said. Last August, the Trump administration tightened restrictions on legal immigrants who receive government benefits, referring to such beneficiaries as “public charges.” The new policy denies green cards to many immigrants who use Medicaid, food stamps and other benefits.

Immigrants in the Dallas area mask their symptoms when ill so they can continue to work, according to Josephine López Paul, a lead organizer with Dallas Area Interfaith. “We’ve seen our service industries obliterated,” said Ms. López Paul. “Immigrants are being hit the hardest right now, and there’s no safety net for them.”

About 7 percent of the U.S. population consists of non-citizens, according to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and noncitizens are significantly more likely to be uninsured. U.S. citizen children who have at least one noncitizen parent are also significantly more likely not to be insured.

Health care is a major concern for María Ramírez, a Dallas-area Catholic who cleans homes. “Since we don’t have our papers, we don’t really go to the doctor when we’re sick,” she said. As for contracting the coronavirus, Ms. Ramírez said undocumented immigrants would be leery of going to a hospital because they would not be able to pay the bill.

“We live day to day,” she said. “We work, and what we earn we spend. We don’t have money saved.”

When undocumented immigrants do approach hospitals, they quickly turn away if they see any law enforcement present, according to Ana Chavarin, lead organizer of Pima County Interfaith in Tucson, Ariz. Ms. Chavarin has met with families who, not knowing how long the pandemic will last or when they will find work again, have begun rationing food.

“Because they are undocumented, they cannot apply for any kind of help,” she said. Some have U.S. citizen children and could apply for benefits on their behalf, she said. But fear of deportation keeps many from doing so.

Food is the number one concern for pastors in Houston, according to Elizabeth Valdez, lead organizer for The Metropolitan Organization. Some parishes and congregations have started to purchase gift cards for food while others are collecting items for the church pantry. Local chapters of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul are gathering items, but since they often count on elderly volunteers, it has been a challenge.

Children cut off from school present another challenge for low-income families. “The kids being home, [families] don’t always have the technology they need to keep up with school,” Ms. Valdez said.

Janie Carrillo, a parishioner at Holy Ghost Church in Houston, said the community pulled together after Hurricane Harvey. The Redemptorist parish is in a low-income neighborhood and serves mostly Spanish-speaking Catholics.

“We have generous people here,” she said, adding that the community is exploring drop-offs and other ways to get food to those in need. “This is probably just the beginning of these problems, so we’re preparing for what’s to come.”

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Knights of Columbus are teaming up in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to provide food and other necessities to those in need, especially the elderly. The “Hearts That Serve” hotline includes grocery and medicine delivery, according to Isaac Cuevas, the associate director of immigration affairs for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

“There has to be a way to get the money into the hands of service workers,” said Joe Rubio, director of the West/Southwest Industrial Area Foundation, a community organizing network. Pastors are seeing an increase in domestic violence, he said, likely stemming from frustration, economic pressure and children being home from school. Studies have found that immigrant survivors of domestic violence are unlikely to report abuse to law enforcement.

Keeping social distance while applying for unemployment benefits in Los Angeles on March 13.

AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez

Isolation and behavioral health issues can also lead to an increase in suicide rates, he said.

“This could profoundly change the nature of parishes and congregations,” Mr. Rubio said, referring not only to the economic impact of the coronavirus but also how communities respond to those in need during the crisis. “We have to think about how we compensate those making the biggest sacrifices and how we ramp up the economy once it’s over.”

Reina Orozco and Jesús Velázquez have been staying indoors with their family in southern California. Both lost their jobs because of the pandemic and they only leave their home to buy groceries. Ms. Orozco, a seamstress, started sewing protective masks for her community.

“We accept donations, like around \$10 for four masks,” she said. “It’s not about business. It’s about helping others. And it helps keep me busy during the day.”

Ms. Orozco estimated that she had made more than 200 masks so far. “No one is thinking about buying a dress right now,” she said.

The couple has been staying connected with their community at St. Agatha Church in Los Angeles, especially with their friends from Bible study and their prayer group.

“I think now is the time to pray for everyone,” Mr. Velázquez said. “The church can help us and we can stay connected to our faith through Catholic radio and television. Now is not the time to lose our faith.”

On a recent morning, Ms. Aguila ran into one of her neighbors while taking out the trash. Her neighbor asked if she could borrow some condensed milk, rice and beans. Ms. Aguila shared what she had.

“We have to give each other a hand when we need it,” she said. “I have faith in Jesus Christ and I think he is asking us to encourage each other. We have to keep moving forward. If someone needs food, we should share what we have. We’re not rich. We’re poor. But we see God’s hand in everything.”

J.D. Long-García, *senior editor*.
Twitter: @jdlonggarcia.



A PROFILE IN ANXIETY

- Of the **11 million** undocumented people in the United States, an estimated **7.1 million** are uninsured.
- The prevalence of diabetes, a risk factor for severe Covid-19, is **22 percent** among Latinos, the highest for any U.S. racial or ethnic group.
- More than **8 million** U.S. children live in households with at least one noncitizen adult and are at risk of losing Medicaid or Children’s Health Insurance Program benefits, household nutrition assistance or both.
- Undocumented immigrants surveyed in California were more worried about paying their bills—**95 percent**—than about contracting the virus itself—**73 percent**.
- Undocumented workers, ineligible for federal emergency aid, paid more than **\$32 billion** in federal, state and local taxes in 2018. Legal immigrants contributed even more, almost **\$427 billion**.
- The Trump administration has declared food and agricultural workers among the “essential” workers who have been asked to continue working even as shelter-in-place orders have been issued across the country. The Department of Agriculture estimates that **50 percent**, or **1 million** farmworkers, are undocumented, but The New York Times reports that growers and labor contractors believe that the true share is closer to **75 percent**.

Sources: New England Journal of Medicine; Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights; New American Economy; The New York Times.



AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo

Despite looming threat from coronavirus, Mexico City prisons keep doors open to visitors

In Mexico City on March 31 a young woman walks past a sign that urges: "Stay home."

Celia Solís waited patiently by the main entrance of the Reclusorio Norte, one of Mexico City's main penitentiaries, a sprawling, concrete complex painted in blue and white. "It usually takes a little while to get in, but since the pandemic started, the number of visitors has gone down a lot," she said. The young woman carried two green bags filled with groceries and some personal items for her husband, one of the 7,076 inmates serving time inside.

"Prisoners...depend for many of their basic needs on the family members visiting them," explained Saskia Niño de Rivera, director of Reinserta, an advocacy group that supports prisoners and their families. "It would make life very difficult for the inmates if they could no longer receive groceries and other items from visitors."

Those visitors are part of the reason Mexico's prisons are particularly vulnerable to the threat of a Covid-19 outbreak. Many are also severely overcrowded and lack even the most basic resources and facilities to isolate and treat prisoners with severe symptoms. "I'm worried about what might happen if one of the prisoners catches the virus," Ms. Solís said. "I don't think the prisons are prepared."

She has good reason to be worried. According to a Reinserta report, none of the penitentiaries in Mexico City have adequate medical facilities. There are no ventilators, no equipment for intubations. Basic hygiene behind these bars is a problem, and rumors and panic can spread quickly.

Mexico is now bracing for a potential Covid-19 outbreak as cases steadily rise. On March 30, the federal government declared a national health emergency. Hugo López-Gatell, the federal undersecretary for public health, warned about the need for social distancing and urged Mexicans to stay at home to prevent coronavirus infections from spiraling out of control.

But many either cannot or will not comply with the gov-

ernment's urgent instructions. Approximately half of the population lives below poverty level, and a significant portion of Mexicans work in the informal sector. For them, staying at home means being unable to provide for their families.

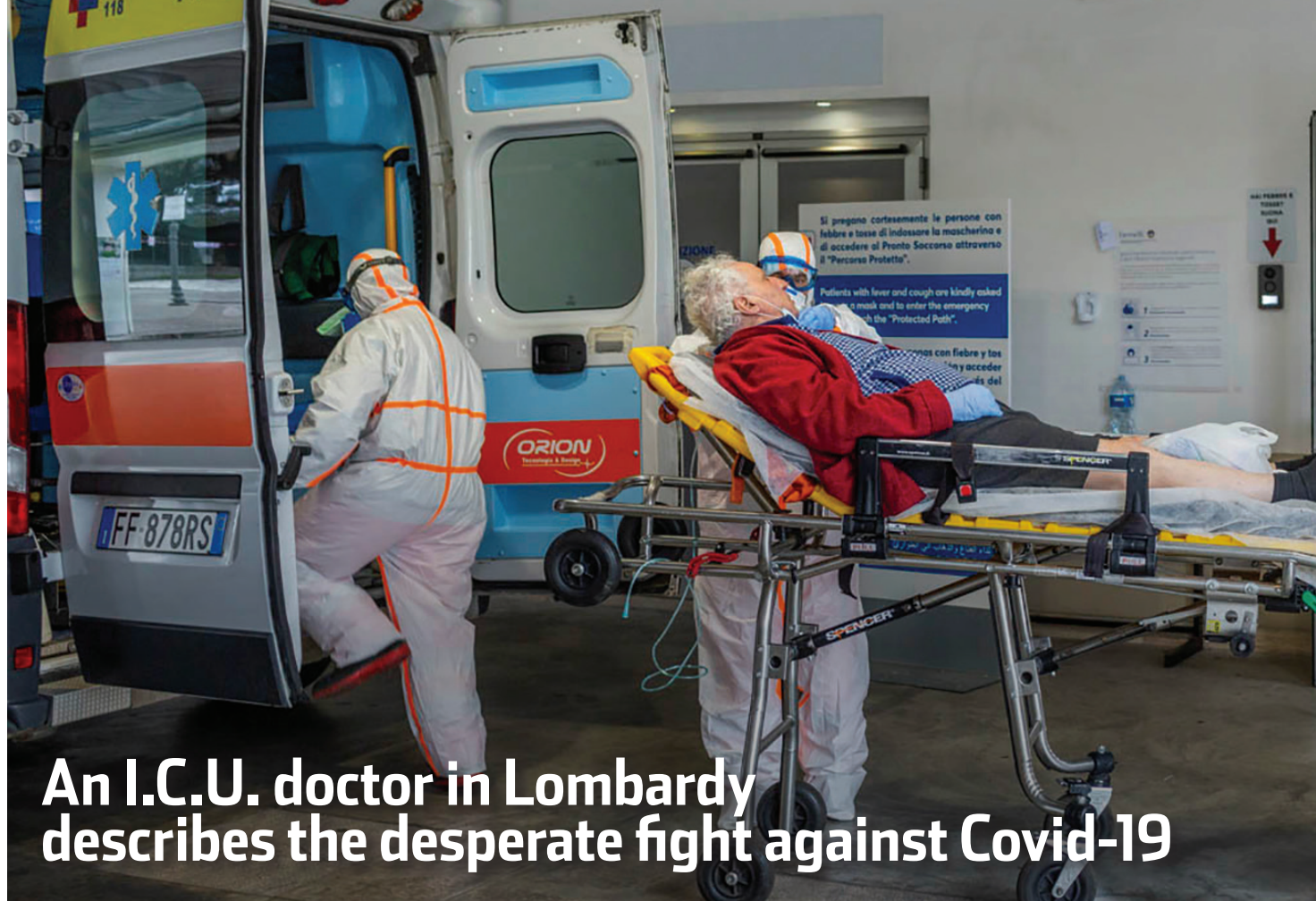
Mexico City authorities first announced they would take measures to prevent a Covid-19 outbreak in the prisons on March 18, providing antibacterial gel, increasing cleaning and ramping up the monitoring of inmates for symptoms of the disease. The visiting regime continued unchanged, however, until March 25, when Rosa Icela Rodríguez, the secretary of government overseeing the penitentiary system in the capital, announced that the number of visitors would be reduced by 50 percent. Minors, pregnant women and people older than 60 are no longer allowed to visit.

Regardless of the measures already taken, on any of the four days per week when prisons allow visitors, thousands of people are still allowed to enter and leave the facilities. "One major problem the authorities face is that the prisoners exercise a degree of self-government in the prisons," Ms. Niño de Rivera said. Many prisons across the country have long been subject to self-rule by criminal gangs. "This means the authorities effectively share control over the facilities. They can't just shut them down and not allow people in. It would almost certainly mean riots."

On April 13, there had been no reports of a Covid-19 outbreak behind bars, but the risk remains high.

Standing in front of the Reclusorio Norte, Ms. Solís sighed. "Maybe it's better to just shut all the prisons down for a while, not allow any visitors in," she said. "But that's not a great scenario either. I want to see my husband; I want to bring him the things he needs, but I don't want him to become sick."

Jan-Albert Hootsen, *Mexico City correspondent.*
Twitter: @jahootsen.



An I.C.U. doctor in Lombardy describes the desperate fight against Covid-19

With more than 156,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus infection on April 13, Italy has had more cases of Covid-19 than the numbers reported in China and has been far surpassed by the outbreak in the United States, but its population of 60 million is significantly smaller than these other nations. The suffering in Italy has been staggering.

The health care structures in northern Italy, especially Lombardy, “were in great difficulty right from the beginning,” Dr. Renata Ghelardi told **America** from the Vizzolo Predabissi Hospital, where she works.

“The situation continues to be very, very difficult in the hospitals of northern Italy because of the lack of intensive care units,” she said, reporting that the hospital system in Bergamo “is in a state of collapse.” She recalled, “We had four intensive care units before the emergency, but we had to increase the number to 17, and to achieve that we had to close the operating theaters and reduce other sectors, including the cardiology unit.”

At her hospital, “so many arrived all at once due to this emergency, we could not cope with the influx. Right now, we have no beds free in I.C.U., so we’ve had to send patients to I.C.U. units in other regions of Italy, and even to Germa-

ny, which offered assistance.”

“We have mostly young people, aged between 30 to 50, in the I.C.U.s.,” she said. “They thought, wrongly, that only the elderly could suffer contagion, but the fact is nobody has the antibodies [to Covid-19], and each person who has the virus—even if without symptoms—is like a kind of atomic bomb for the others to whom they could transmit the virus.”

She admits life is hard on the front line, but she said “all the staff” in her hospital “are working with immense generosity. As doctors, we work eight hours per day in normal times, and in emergencies up to 12. In this emergency, however, many doctors work 16 hours a day; they don’t stop, and some even sleep in the hospital instead of going home.”

But this leads to another problem. “When you are under pressure like this,” she said, “you are not able to give the best care to the patient. You just do what you can.”

On March 9, the Italian government decreed a nationwide lockdown. She applauded this measure. “It is so important,” Dr. Ghelardi said. “It enforces the isolation that prevents the spread of the virus and gives hospitals the chance to cope.”

Reflecting on her traumatic weeks of service, Dr. Ghelardi, a mother of three, said, “We were the first country



Medical workers at Gemelli Hospital in Rome attend an elderly coronavirus patient on March 16.

CNS photo/Policlinico Gemelli, handout via Reuters

that is not authoritarian and had not had the previous experience of fighting SARS to face Covid-19, as China had.

“We had to learn from day to day how to combat it and what was needed to prevent its spread. We didn’t have the necessary protection—masks, gowns, gloves and so on—and we didn’t at that stage understand how contagious and aggressive this virus was and the speed with which it moves. Several colleagues died; a great many were infected; some are still in the hospital.”

Despite the lack of preparation and protective equipment, Dr. Ghelardi said, “We were brave. We blazed the trail and are now better protected and prepared, though the situation is still very, very difficult. We are not over the hill yet.”

She noted that “other countries in Europe and the United States had two to three weeks to prepare for it and should have benefited from Italy’s experience, but amazingly some didn’t. They seemed to consider themselves immune and are now paying the price.”

Gerard O’Connell, *Vatican correspondent*.
Twitter: @gerryorome.



Masked servers at a soup kitchen in Buenos Aires on March 26

GOODNEWS: Priests and parishes in Buenos Aires shantytowns step up response because of coronavirus

With the coronavirus pandemic bearing down on Argentina, the *curas villeros*, priests who serve the slums and shantytowns of Buenos Aires, are mobilizing their parish communities to tend to the needy.

The soup kitchen at the Rev. Nicolas Angelotti’s parish had been feeding 1,500 residents daily, with demand driven by a weak economy and unemployment. Now it feeds as many as 4,000 people per day after a quarantine was imposed on March 20.

The *curas villeros* work on the front lines of social and economic crises in Argentina, tending to marginalized populations who often must get by without state services. Their parishes have expanded soup kitchens, offering food to go, and have turned their churches and other buildings into shelters where the elderly and homeless can isolate themselves from the pandemic. They have also established places for infected individuals to receive care.

“The message is: Stay in your home, stay in your barrio,” Father Angelotti said. Often, though, “It’s impossible that people stay in their homes due to their social situation.”

He explained, “These homes are precarious. They don’t have potable water...and there are a lot of people crowded into them.”

Some of the *curas villeros* met on March 25 with President Alberto Fernández to discuss how to help a population that tends to work in the informal economy, where jobs have dried up and working from home is impossible. The president used his Twitter account to thank the slum priests “for contributing at this difficult time and for making parishes available for isolation for those without a roof over their heads,” calling them “an example of the solidarity in Argentina we should be building.”

David Agren, *Catholic News Service*.

LITANY FOR A PANDEMIC

What a Jesuit learned under quarantine in Milan

By Patrick Gilger

After sunset each night teenagers gather in the piazza below the windows of my fifth floor room. They are not rowdy, not really. They are just young.

And here, apparently, that means they talk and sing a bit, and then drink a bit and sing a bit more. Then they sit and laugh and sing in the darkness beneath my room. Which is why I cannot sleep. And it is sleep I need because I am sick.

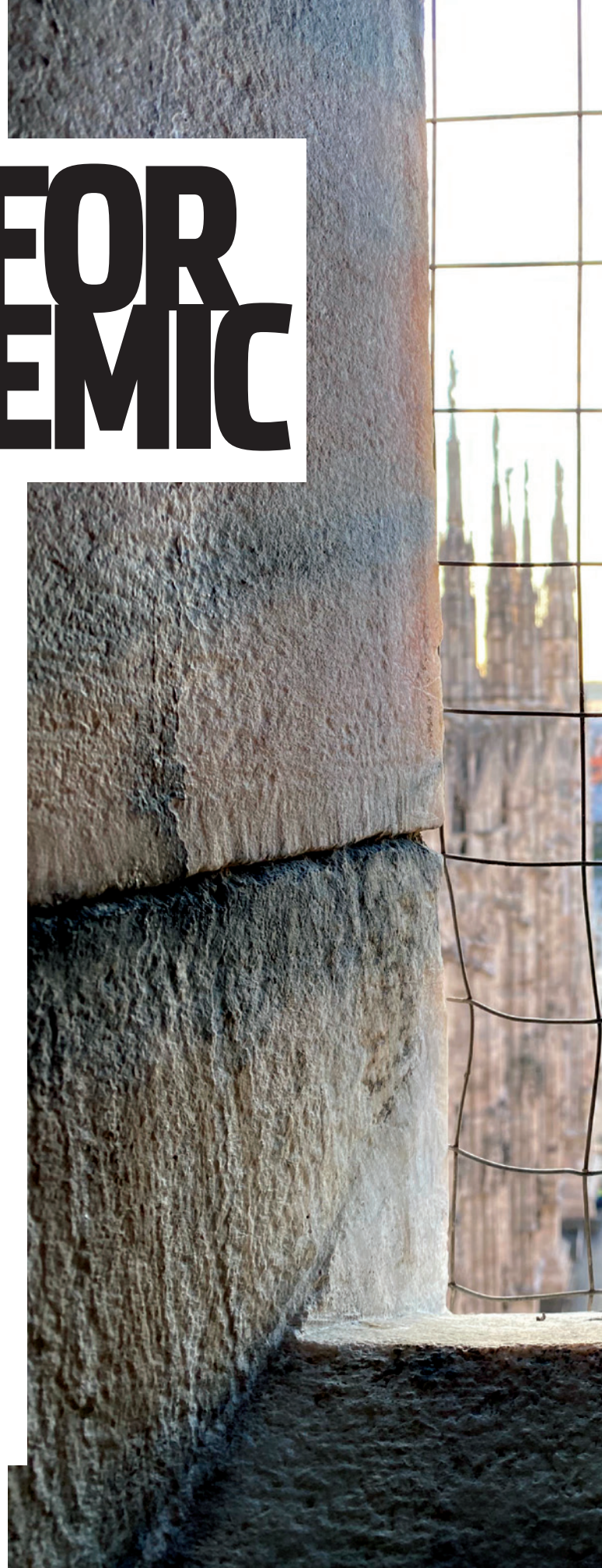
Two weeks later, I am no longer sick, and it is easy to sleep. And though I presume that somewhere those teenagers are still laughing and singing and drinking, during these times of quarantine they are no longer under my windows. I miss them.

On a clear day my view is superb. To the north the snow-capped tips of the Alps are visible. To the south, if I lean out far enough, is the golden Madonnina that crowns the steeple of the Duomo; and crowding in upon its skirts just out of my view, the famed La Scala opera house.

Milan. On a normal day a visitor would find it genteel and lively, historic and modern, businesslike and bustling; a city fast approaching the Platonic ideal of cosmopolitan Europe. But much has changed.

Having just arrived here in early March, healthy and whole, I cannot measure how much. The news that the coronavirus was loose in Lombardy only crossed the U.S. radar the day before I left New York City—and even with such little warning time, my red eye across the Atlantic was all but empty. Uncomplaining, I pushed up the armrests on my row and slept.

Landing at Milan Malpensa the next morning, I was—





after a quick temperature scan by a pair of masked health care workers—passed through customs with scarcely a word. A train ride later I arrived at the doors of the building where I was to stay: Leone XIII, a Jesuit high school just northwest of downtown.

It was a Tuesday morning, and I had prepared myself for the sights and sounds of a high school, the buzz of 1,000 young women and men. But that is not what I found. Schools—along with museums and sporting events and all other events that gather humans in significant scale—had been shuttered the day before. When I arrived, the piazza out front was empty, the lights turned out at the front desk, a black steel security gate pulled across the front doors, which, after a few rings of the bell, were opened to me by an elegant elderly priest.

Schools have remained closed for the weeks I have lived here, and they will remain so through at least early April, when I had intended to depart. The halls and classrooms are silent; the neighboring church is dark. But the city itself, although it seems slow even to this stranger, feels neither lifeless nor overrun by fear.

Instead, it feels patient, attentive; like a whale that has just submerged after filling its lungs with air: Yes, eventually it would need to breathe again. But not yet.

...

I confess that, schooled as I am in our American response to such crises, this patience is for me a puzzle. Even for a blizzard we Americans clear the shelves of bread and milk. Our rational reaction to panic is to prepare what can be prepared and obtain what can be obtained.

We know how the logic goes; it's etched more deeply into our memories than any song our mothers sang us: *I should buy another. My responsibility is to those I love. I should buy another. If they go without, I will never forgive myself. I should buy another.*

This is not to say that Americans are not a generous people; we are. But above all we are pragmatists, and our customary response even in times of abundance is to build bigger barns in which to store our grain.

And so even hospitals must now wait a month for masks and the shelves stand empty of hand sanitizer. And so again—because it is rational and because we are well-practiced and because it is immensely difficult to imagine another way of managing the fear that accompanies crises—we have performed the score as written.

It feels different here. This is a difference neither of some greater capacity for altruism nor of some miraculous philanthropic abundance. People are neither more heroic,

All images credited to Patrick Gilger, S.J.

The view in Milan days before the quarantine brought everyday life to a standstill

Milan, under quarantine, has asked me to renounce the particular version of our American response to fear that I have made my own.

nor is there more to be given. And perhaps Manhattan—where I normally live and where the hospital beds are now full and the U.S.N.S. Comfort now docks—feels different now as well.

But here it is as if the familiar refrain I have been taught to sing in response to the verse of fear has been changed just slightly. From the key of C to B minor. As if there were some handwritten instruction on the sheet music the city is performing that reads: *lento*; *più piano*.

I must say, being assumed into this social melody has been for me—a Jesuit, a priest—a peculiarly apt Lenten penance. It is as if Milan, under quarantine, has asked me to renounce the particular version of our American response to fear that I have made my own: the unceasing effort to control, to master, to define and thereby dictate what is really real and truly true. And thereby be secure.

Unlike the Italians singing to each other from their balconies in Napoli and Siena and Rome, I do not yet sing this song well.

...

St. Cyprian was the bishop of Carthage, the ruins of which lie today under a suburb of Tunis, in the middle of the third century. Aside from certain theologians and historians of late antiquity, the world knows Cyprian mainly for one thing: There is a plague named after him. Over the course of some 20 years, the Plague of Cyprian ravaged its way across the Roman Empire. From Ethiopia to Scotland, it devastated the populations of both city and countryside. It was one of the acids that ate away at the foundations of an empire already slowly disintegrating.

This plague bears Cyprian's name neither because he was responsible for it nor because he resolved it, but because he wrote about it. It is because of his "De Mortalitate," a sermon written to console the faithful in the midst of the epidemic, that we know something of its effects.

It is because of his writing that we know, for example, that this plague arrived with a terrible fever that began,



as he put it, "in the inmost depths" and burned outwards, causing "wounds in the throat." It is how we know that it shook the intestines so that no nourishment could be retained, and that it set the eyes "on fire from the force of the blood" rushing through the body. It is because of his short panegyric that we know that many of those who suffered it were left deafened or blinded or crippled.

And it is Cyprian's brief descriptions that have allowed epidemiological historians to postulate that his plague was, in all likelihood, either some form of viral hemorrhagic fever—a filovirus like Ebola—or a highly contagious virus causing acute respiratory disease. Like our Covid-19.

And just as we are now learning that national borders are not sufficient to curb the threat of such a pandemic, so did these ancient Christians learn that disease is no minder of creed. Just like their neighbors, they suffered. And, like humans of every age, they wanted to know why.

It is to his credit that Cyprian does not really answer that question. Instead of attempting to give these people—people with whom he spent his life, beside whom he worked, with whom ate, next door to whom he slept, who sat before him at the holy sacrifice—an explanation, Cypri-



The Milan Cathedral in the Piazza del Duomo. The cathedral is closed to visitors.

an instead reminded them of their hope in eternal life and asked them to search their suffering in this world for meaning in another way.

He did this by asking them to consider not the cause of the plague, but their response. Here are his words: “Beloved brethren, what is it, what a great thing is it, how pertinent, how necessary, that pestilence and plague which seems horrible and deadly, searches out the righteousness of each one...to see whether they who are in health tend the sick; whether relations affectionately love their kindred; whether masters pity their languishing servants; whether physicians do not forsake the beseeching patients.”

Cyprian asked the people of Carthage to regard this plague as the bearer of a question: Are those in health tending the sick? Are physicians caring for their patients? Are the rich showing compassion for the poor?

In the waning days of the Roman Empire, Cyprian asked people fearful of the effects of a terrible plague to come nearer to suffering, to brave proximity to danger, to risk themselves for others.

We still see and honor such choices today, in health

care workers and grocery store clerks and all those who stand on the front lines of our own pandemic. They teach us, as did Cyprian, that the question of whether we have the courage to come closer to those who are suffering must be posed again and again.

...

For those first two weeks in Milan, before social distancing became social discipline, I did my best to find a pattern for my days. And since my research (one of the two reasons I had come to Italy, the other being to study the language) had been well and truly disrupted, I began approximating my normal routine. I awoke, dressed, drank an absurdly tiny *café lungo* produced by a machine almost as tall as myself and stopped by the chapel before returning to my room to attend hours of Italian class that is now, as with so much else, a video call.

Then, in the afternoons, my mind still abblur with non *capisco's* and *sbaglio's* and the thousand meanings of the word *cí*, I would walk the city. It was quiet then, but not anxious. Thinned, but not empty. There was still gelato to be had and churches to be visited, dogs to be walked and old men playing bocce in the park.



The view from the author's room in Milan. He now attends his Italian language classes via Zoom.

After, I would return home to the empty school, brush the rain from my shoulders and head to Mass and dinner with the Jesuit community. We would eat pasta and prosciutto, drink white wine and perhaps a bit of grappa as a digestif. For the most part, I would stay silent during these meals, doing my best to follow the rapid pitter-patter of words falling around me, until Father Bagatti, careful and patient, would ask me about my day. An unselfconsciously courteous man, the pace of his speech would slow so that I could catch the meaning of his words: *Che cosa hai fatto oggi?*

Father Bagatti is the soul of an Italian gentleman. Nearly 80 now, he passes for 20 years younger with little trouble. He smiles readily, holds his cigarette in precisely three fingers, always offers a toast before taking his first sip of wine. It was he who had opened the gate of the school to my nervous ringing that first morning, strolling toward me wearing his black, faded, impeccably fitted clerical suit. His thick, white hair was combed straight back in a pompadour, and a wool overcoat hung from his shoulders so that when he reached out and gently took my hand in greeting, it was as if I had stepped off an airplane and into “The Irishman.”

I do my best, each time he asks, to respond to his ques-

tion about my day. One night, with the words of a toddler, I tried and failed to describe what it was to kneel before St. Ambrose’s body as it lay beneath the altar in the basilica that bears his name. On another I strained to relate the experience of standing in silence before the octagonal baptistery where, at the Easter Vigil in the year 387, St. Augustine and his eternally restless heart were plunged, by that same Ambrose, into the healing waters. I did not at that time know the Italian word for tears.

Father Bagatti listens with unstrained attention, filling the gaps in my efforts at speech with a few well-anticipated words and, because he is a gentleman, correcting only the most grating of my grammatical mistakes. He has been living in Milan for decades; has been superior of the community at Leone XIII since there were more than 20 Jesuits living here. Now there are four.

One evening, after I finished speaking, I learned how much the city had changed not just over those decades but these weeks. He told a story that seemed a riddle to him.

On his walk that afternoon, he said, he had chanced upon a few others out doing the same and, his usual manner altered only by the distance he maintained, greeted



The world knows Cyprian mainly for one thing: There is a plague named after him.

them. But instead of responding with pleasure they were shaken, shocked to be greeted at all. Offering only a cursory response, each moved quickly on their way.

Even in the retelling he is chagrined. His lips press together and the corners of his mouth pull taut as he turns the moment over in his memory, a puzzle box refusing to open. A moment passes. I take a sip of wine. We sit together. And then, half to us and half to himself, he asks: Why were they so alarmed?

There are certain things we can share while remaining quite alone. The kind of mutual hurt shared only by lovers, for example. Or resentment. Or anxiety.

Yet there is a difference, psychologists tell us, between anxiety and fear. Fear has an object upon which to focus: The sound in the darkness; the weapon in the hand. Anxiety, on the other hand, does not. Fear relates to something. Anxiety is our response to unknown threats.

But even though we are uncertain about when it will end, the crisis through which we are now passing is not entirely unknown. We are beginning to construct an understanding of this pandemic, an object upon which to focus. We have a name for it and we have numbers of the infected.

We have threat assessments and economic effects and risk factors stratified by age. We should be able to move from isolated anxiety toward shared response.

But then there are the empty shelves. And the requisite two meters between everyone, all the time.

Father Bagatti is well aware of the need for physical distance. He has told me as much both in words and in the fact that he now takes his daily walks on the roof of the high school rather than through the city. He understands; he is obedient.

But surely it must be a strange thing to have lived to see not proximity but distance become the act of courage required to contain this pandemic. Even more when that necessary distance manifests in a startled and frightened response to an old man's greeting, more a psychic than a physical separation. It seems the height of irony, in our alone-together age, that this pandemic requires us, for their good as well as our own, to avoid the nearness of strangers.

After a few moments Father Bagatti lifts his head. The smile has returned to his eyes. He looks around, lifts his glass; offers a toast: *Chi vivra, vedra*, he says.

It's an old Italian proverb, one that roughly translates as "time will tell," or "wait and see." And it's more or less fine to use it that way if you ever find yourself in need of an Italian proverb. But, as always, there is a sliver of meaning missing from the translation. Because what the words say is not "time will tell" but "the one who lives will see."

...

St. Charles Borromeo, whose body lies inside a crystal-fronted altar in a small chapel beneath the cupola of the Duomo, was cardinal archbishop of Milan in the mid-16th century. He is a man famous for so many things—being a relentless reformer, a founder of schools, the organizer of the final session of the Council of Trent—that it is easy to overlook the fact that there is also a plague named after him.

The Plague of San Carlo arrived in Milan in the summer of 1576 and stayed until the beginning of 1578. Over the year and half that it governed the city, it disrupted civic life, brought commerce to a standstill, and took the lives of more than 17,000 people. Most of these were the poor, of course, as the city's governor and nobility had fled as soon as victims began to fill the Ca' Granda hospital. (The same hospital is once again filled with the sick today. It is the hospital you have read about, the one you have seen on the news. It is one of the best in all of Europe.)

With most of its leadership in absentia, it was Borromeo who attempted to bring order to Milan. A talented organizer, he mandated quarantines, saw to the cleaning of city streets and arranged for the hungry to be fed. He re-wrote his will designating the Ca' Granda as his sole bene-

There are certain things we can share while remaining quite alone.

ficiary. But as necessary as these pragmatic actions were, Borromeo was determined that the city should offer a religious response as well. So he planned three grand processions, three acts of public and collective penance that would both beg God for relief and renew the solidarity of the frightened populace.

They were arresting events. Beginning at the Duomo, in the heart of the city, thousands of Milanese citizens processed together through the streets, reciting penitential psalms as they went. Walking barefoot and wearing the noose of a condemned criminal, Borromeo himself led each of these processions, carrying before him one of the Holy Nails that legend holds was pulled from the True Cross by St. Helena, mother of Constantine. And while the sight of the cardinal dressed in sackcloth was, by all accounts of the historians upon whose records we rely, remarkable, it was the sound of the pilgrimage that was most striking. Because as they processed, they sang.

It was a litany that they sang, a simple, repetitive chant imploring the intercession of the saints. *Sancta Maria*, the cantor would cry. *Ora pro nobis*, the people would respond. And then the name of another saint, Ambrose or Monica or Augustine, would be called and the *ora pro nobis* would again ring through the streets. And so on.

They are plain songs, litanies, straightforward and repetitive, almost democratic in their capacity to include all voices. As only a simple song can do, litanies draw us together in a common action; they push us toward something, like a father standing behind us at a swing set. Which is why they are still sung today, at the Easter Vigil, for example, or at the ordination of priests, or at baptisms—all the occasions at which the whole church, living and dead, on earth as it is in heaven, is gathered.

The processions were without a doubt powerful. But even in the 16th century, long before human beings understood the germs that cause plagues, we had realized that contagion could only be managed by distance. Which is why Borromeo quickly suspended the processions. He sent



The Basilica of Sant'Ambrogio in Milan. Inside, St. Ambrose's body lies beneath the altar.

people home; asked them to shelter in place.

And while the processions stopped, the litanies did not. Instead Borromeo had small booklets with the litany printed and distributed so that, for as long as the quarantine lasted, these separated people could find some kind of community through them. So it was that in quarantined Milan, for nearly a year and a half, every few hours the church bells would ring and people would step to their windows and doorways. And they would sing.

"Just think," wrote Paulo Bisciola, whose *Relazione Verissima* describes those months of plague, "in walking around Milan, one heard nothing but song."

...

I went to see St. Charles's body in the chapel below the high altar of the Duomo on a Thursday afternoon, two days before my fever began. I went to bed that Saturday night with the hollow, clammy feeling we get when we are begging our bodies not to get sick. On Sunday morning I knew the truth of the matter.

There were, thank God, only three of us in attendance at the Mass that morning. I huddled in the back of our tiny house chapel and clenched my teeth to keep them from rattling. Father Bagatti presided, his purple and gold chasuble



throwing the light of the morning sun into my eyes. I did not take the cup.

It was no great sacrifice to remain isolated in my room those days. With the benefit of hindsight, and out of love for these elderly men who have welcomed me so well, I wish I had started two days sooner.

On Monday I call a friend. This friend is a physician, an infectious disease specialist at a major American university hospital. But more than that he is one of those rare people, the kind some few of us are fortunate enough to have, before whom I do not have to be strong. I tell him what is happening, lean the dead weight of my anxiety upon him. And he—all heart, all heart—holds me up.

Even there in Milan, he tells me, even though you are there, you probably do not have the coronavirus. And even if you do, you are young, you are healthy: you will be fine. Take some medicine. Rest. Call me if something changes. But probably you do not have it.

Listening to him, I take one breath. And then another, deeper. And I ask: What must I do in the meantime?

I have known this man for two decades, since we were 19 years old and doing the things that 19-year-olds do. Now, in response to my question, his voice is soft, direct, calm.

This is what you must do, he says. Stay in your room. It doesn't matter whether you have the coronavirus. Stay in your room. You will be fine, but it is not you who are in danger. Stay in your room.

I nod in agreement before remembering that he cannot see me. I say out loud that I will do as he instructs.

It is not so difficult, it turns out, to be obedient to what is required. I have. We are. The thing we are struggling with is not the courage to keep our distance; we are learning to share that much. But even shared anxiety ends in isolation.

"Stay in your room" is not precisely a litany, but neither is it so different. It tells us what to do and points us in a direction. And we know how to repeat it, like a mantra, to ourselves. But, thus far at least, it is only a call and not yet a response.

It is the singing that is lacking. Perhaps we have forgotten how. Perhaps we have not yet been taught.

Outside the windows of my room are dozens of apartments, many with small balconies. Their iron railings are clothed in the greenery of early spring or painted stark white to sharpen the contrast with the tile roofs. In many cities the Italians, as perhaps you have seen, are singing to each other from just such balconies.

I would love to say that I have heard them singing from the balconies within view of my room. I have not. What I have heard instead are ambulances on the empty streets—the sound of care being brought to those who are suffering.

They are the sound of help. Still, sirens are no *ora pro nobis*.

...

It is the next Sunday. Noon. My fever has broken. All the rest in the house, thank God, are still healthy.

Milan is gray and silent. I walk to my window to look at the city I cannot touch. Across the piazza where the teenagers would sing there is a boy, no more than 12, stepping with his sister onto their balcony. He holds a golden trumpet. He looks at her, smiles; raises it to his lips.

The sound rolls across the empty piazza below. Reverberates among the mute apartment buildings.

He is not good. Not yet.

But none refuse his gift. No wagging fingers emerge to scold him.

It is an unmistakable sound, life.

Chi vivra, vedra.

The one who lives will see.

Patrick Gilger, S.J., is pursuing a doctorate in sociology at the New School for Social Research in New York. He is *America's* contributing editor for culture.

LABOR LESSONS

Lessons from recovery culture on the meaning of work

By Eve Tushnet

“Things began to come together. I got a job scrubbing toilets, that honestly I am grateful for. It taught me about humility and showing up to do a good job, no matter what job I’m doing. It stripped me of my ego in the best possible way.”

This is a description of life in early sobriety written by Hannah Lund in 2017 for The Voices Project, a grassroots recovery organization. It is an especially clear and concise statement of an understanding of the purpose of work, from a perspective shared through much of the 12-step or “recovery culture” world. There is no requirement to hold a particular belief about the nature of work in order to practice 12-step recovery, nor is a specific philosophy of work part of the written traditions and literature of Alcoholics Anonymous. What I call the recovery attitude toward work is a tendency, not a principle. You do not need to think this way in order to get sober through the 12 steps, let alone to recover from addiction by one of the many other paths that work for many. And yet attending to the implicit theology of work that has developed “in the rooms,” as they say, of Alcoholics Anonymous and its affiliates can help all of us think through the deeper meaning of work.

Outside recovery culture almost nobody talks about work the way Hannah Lund does. Bureaucrats, policy wonks, politicians and activists rarely praise work for its simplicity, humility and ability to strip the ego. When they describe good jobs they do not talk about scrubbing toilets. Perhaps surprisingly, Catholic leaders do not often talk like Lund either. When popes ex-



plain the economic and social teaching of the church, they praise work in terms that would be totally alien to the recovery attitude.

The recovery attitude offers only a partial account of work's purpose, but its insights can make the Catholic understanding of work more complete, more honest and less sexist. Recovery culture can illuminate what we need from work.


Even before Covid-19 caused unprecedented layoffs and furloughs, work had become unexpectedly precarious. Automation is perhaps the most obvious reason that policymakers and political philosophers have begun to wonder if work still has a universal purpose. If robots are stealing our jobs, is that so bad? Work was once called "the curse of Adam," and some posit that clinging to its grueling demands would be as willfully punitive as keeping women from receiving epidurals because Eve was condemned to the pains of childbirth. Articles with titles like "Post-work: The radical idea of a world without jobs," and books like David Graeber's 2018 *Bullshit Jobs*, suggest that work is a necessary evil—and when it becomes unnecessary, that is cause for rejoicing.

The Benefits and Burdens of Work


Catholic theology views work ambivalently. Adam tilled the garden, while Jesus offers rest from labor. The grueling, depleting aspect of labor is Adam's curse; and yet in work we have an opportunity to participate in God's own work of creation. Pope John Paul II, in both "Laborem Exercens" and "Centesimus Annus," consistently locates work's goodness in the opportunities it offers for creativity, responsibility and the exercise of human freedom. Modern papal encyclicals argue that good work creates community and solidarity (friendship) rather than division and isolation. But good work also develops and expresses the individual personality.

This idea that work is valuable when it is a forum for self-expression is hardly confined to papal documents. Graeber correctly argues that people hate purposeless jobs, and these jobs destroy their psyches. Yet he gives





In the recovery world, the normative worker—the person whose job best expresses the inherent nature of work, its purpose and even its beauty—is the janitor.



an oversimplified account of purposeful work when he explains that we delight in seeing the effects of our own actions on the world—what the early psychologist Karl Groos called “pleasure at being the cause.”

In the 1970s, during an earlier wave of worker dissatisfaction (manifested in rising absenteeism, wildcat strikes and poll numbers showing a collapse in the percentage of Americans who believed that “hard work will always pay off”), sources from government, the universities and private industry warned that people hated working because boring, repetitive jobs leached work’s purpose. “Work in America,” a 1973 report to the secretary of health, education and welfare, argued, “What the workers want most, as more than 100 studies in the past 20 years show, is to become masters of their immediate environments and to feel that their work and they themselves are important—the twin ingredients of self-esteem.” Satisfying jobs, the report argued, offer “variety, autonomy, and meaningful responsibility.”

Ms. Lund did not name the first two qualities and only alluded to the last of these. In recovery culture, work offers very different benefits, which may even seem to be at odds with the autonomy and self-expression praised by mainstream thought. To radically oversimplify: In contemporary activist accounts, there is no ideal job, no kind of work toward which we might aspire; the normative worker is actually a person at leisure. In many recent Christian theological accounts, the normative worker is an artisan, perhaps an artist. But in the recovery world, the normative worker—the person whose job best expresses the inherent nature of work, its purpose and even its beauty—is the janitor.

All of these approaches express some insight. But the

recovery perspective is the least-often heard. It is also timely in a world in which low-paid, low-status jobs have suddenly been deemed essential. Friends in retail have expressed surprise at the way (some) customers now understand that their jobs are crucial and even risky. Where was that respect a year ago? The cover of the April 13, 2020, issue of *The New Yorker* shows a rainswept, deserted city, with only one small human being in the darkness: a delivery worker on a bicycle, bringing groceries. The name of the picture is “Lifeline.”

The Curse Becomes a Blessing

It is a commonplace of Christian writing about work to note that Jesus was a carpenter: an artisan, a creator, a maker of discrete objects—a very different image from the parables about shepherds and servants. The 1961 encyclical of Pope John XXIII, “*Mater et Magistra*,” declares that work is “the immediate expression of a human personality.” The Anglican priest John Hughes, in his excellent study *The End of Work: Theological Critiques of Capitalism*, argues that the English Romantics (John Ruskin, William Morris and others) offered one of the most vivid pictures of unalienated labor—characterized, once more, by “sensuous pleasure and autonomous creativity.” In this view, work improves as it approaches the status of art, not cleaning.

A notable exception is the discussion, toward the end of John Paul II’s encyclical “*Centesimus Annus*,” of work as our opportunity to imitate Christ on the cross: “By enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the son of God for the redemption of humanity. He shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn every day in the activity that he is called upon to perform.” The curse of Adam becomes for us a blessing; this is a rare passage of modern papal thought in which we imitate Christ in work primarily through our obedience.

In recovery culture, creative self-expression has an ambivalent value at best. Alcoholics Anonymous does teach people how to “share,” how to narrate their experiences of addiction and recovery. This education emphasizes the ways in which your story is like other people’s (you are not “terminally unique”). A healthy meeting will encourage “shares” that do not conform to a rigid pattern—expressing frustration or even criticism of the program itself is part of the honesty that is foundational to sobriety. But as Leslie Jamison’s literary memoir, *The Recovering: Intoxication and Its Aftermath*, explored in depth, recovery culture can be skeptical of autonomy and creativity:

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AMERICA'S GUIDE TO RETREATS

Many of our readers are curious about retreats. What does one do on a retreat? Where does one go? What are some good retreat houses? Simply put, a retreat is an extended period of prayer, usually done in silence, and usually at a retreat house, where a team of spiritual directors helps you find God in your prayer. There are also different kinds of retreats. On a directed retreat a person meets daily with a spiritual director to discuss what is happening in prayer. A guided retreat focuses more on one topic (say, women's spirituality) and offers presentations as well as opportunities to meet with a director a few times. Preached retreats consist in listening to presentations and praying on your own, but with less opportunity for direction.

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For recovery culture, the value of work is that it gives structure to life's chaos.

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In recovery, I found a community that resisted what I'd always been taught about stories—that they had to be unique—suggesting instead that a story was most useful when it wasn't unique at all, when it understood itself as something that had been lived before and would be lived again.... Originality wasn't the ideal, and beauty wasn't the point.

For recovery culture, the value of work is that it gives structure to life's chaos; it is simple, intelligible even when your own heart is baffling; it lets you be of service to others, making every job well done a kind of living amends; and, above all, good work brings humility. The more humble the work, the more obviously it helps you recover. Twelve-stepers love riches-to-rags stories: the high-flying sales rep who “used to go to work in a suit and now comes home covered in dust”; the stylist to the stars who had to redo her training from the bottom, crying with relief when she received her hairdresser's license. For those of us in recovery these are actually rags-to-riches stories. An actively drinking alcoholic has nothing even if she stands at the summit of her profession. In sobriety she has something priceless,

even if she is pushing a broom for minimum wage.

Or for no wage at all. Even in very early sobriety, people in A.A. are encouraged to take on “service commitments.” These are often small tasks like making the coffee, setting up the chairs for meetings, cleaning up afterward. Cleaning is an especially powerful act for recovery culture, because it is a microcosm of the massive restoration you are undergoing in your own life. There is a reason the great literary work of 12-step culture, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, includes a memorable scene of the recovering addict Don Gately at the janitorial “humility job” required by his halfway house, hosing feces off the showers at a men's shelter. And one chapter is just a list of things you learn in a halfway house for substance addiction, including the hard truth: “That a clean room feels better to be in than a dirty room.”

These often foul tasks (Gately “just shuts his head off” to get through it) focus your attention on the aspects of work that are important to your recovery. You know what to do. You know who you are doing it for—calling this work “service” emphasizes that it is about relationship. And you know that your worth is no longer determined by your in-

Recovery culture can illuminate what we need from work, and guide us as we navigate a world where work seems ever more precarious.



tellest, your accomplishments or even the length of your sobriety. You know that anything that encourages you to think of yourself as superior to others is dangerous for you, and anything that helps you to see your own littleness is good for you. You learn the incredible relief of being useful.

The writer Hunter R. Slaton, who worked “on the ice” in Antarctica in a failed attempt to escape his drinking problem, recalls his service commitment cleaning up after an A.A. meeting:

The push broom was the same type of wooden, bristled broom I’d glumly wielded in Antarctica. But, unlike how I felt then, broken and miserable at the bottom of the world, here I was in a drab school basement, deliriously happy, sweeping the floors—the humblest of jobs, really—at a meeting I’d grown desperately to love. For maybe the first time in my life, I was accepting life on life’s terms, and not kicking back violently at “conditions,” as I had while on the Ice.

Lessons for Those Outside the Rooms

It is not only prayer that gives God glory but work. Smiting on an anvil, sawing a beam, whitewashing a wall, driving horses, sweeping, scouring, everything gives God some glory if being in his grace you do it as your duty.... To lift up the hands in prayer gives God glory, but a man with a dungfork in his hand, a woman with a slop pail, gives him glory too.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

It would be easy to claim that these aspects of work are only important for people with addiction, at least in part

because then we are relieved from the feeling that maybe, if they apply to all of us, they should color our theology or policy. But part of the allure of recovery culture is that it is one of the few remaining common languages we can use to discuss universal experiences of shame, sin, relapse, helplessness—and rescue, restoration, amends, humility. Despite the A.A. slang of alcoholics versus “normies,” perhaps addiction is just a triple-distillation of our common condition, and we alcoholics are just like normal people, only more so.

There are four ways in which the recovery culture of work can improve the thinking of those outside the rooms of A.A. First, if work provides structure and a chance to be of service, then any “post-work” future must recognize and meet these needs. David Graeber insouciantly imagines a work-free future where people “knit sweaters, play with their dogs, start a garage band, experiment with new recipes, or sit in cafes arguing about politics, and gossiping about their friends’ complex polyamorous affairs.”

This is a self-absorbed vision in itself, but the reality is likely to be an even more depleting toggle along the entertainment–depression axis. Oren Cass’s book of conservative pop policy, *The Once and Future Worker*, notes that we already have people who can live easily without working: “We call the result a ‘trust fund baby.’ The term is not synonymous with ‘kind, well-adjusted, productive member of society.’”

And many people have a “post-work” present, whether due to disability, family responsibilities, inability to find a job or idle wealth. Structured service to others (including through prayer) is either something these people are already doing, for which they deserve honor, or something they can begin to do in order to avoid the moral dangers of self-absorbed idleness. The two obvious havens for unpaid service are the family and the monastery. In the monastery, as in prayer more generally, we both labor and delight. We contemplate God, which is not work. We also intercede for others, which is a form of service. The precariousness of contemporary work is only one reason to work toward a monastic revival; for those who are not called to vowed religious life, A.A. might inspire new forms of structured service and joy.

The second insight recovery culture can provide is an ideal of work that focuses on care rather than solely on creativity. David Graeber writes, “[M]ost working-class labor, whether carried out by men or women, actually more resembles what we archetypically think of as women’s work,



looking after people, seeing to their wants and needs, explaining, reassuring, anticipating what the boss wants or is thinking, not to mention caring for, monitoring, and maintaining plants, animals, machines, and other objects, than it involves hammering, carving, hoisting, or harvesting things.” From retail service to motherhood, some of the most common forms of work in our society look more like sustaining than like artisanal creation. Recovery culture, with its iconography of the mop and toilet brush, honors the repetitive work that sustains and restores our world.

This attention to care corrects the male bias of much philosophy of work. It not only makes workers’ individuality more evident. (Graeber notes that the belief that most low-income work is “productive,” rather than caring, makes it easier to treat workers like machines.) It also reminds us that God’s work is sustaining work. Our very existence is proof not that God loved us once upon a time, before we were born and started messing stuff up, but that God loves us now—we know this, because God’s love is what maintains us in existence. To be like God is to care and sustain and clean and restore, not simply to create.

In Search of a Healthy Hierarchy

Like all ideals, the ideal of work as service is frequently abused. The 12-step emphasis on humility may be the single most common justification for abuse within recovery culture, and work is one of the ways in which that abuse is perpetrated. Where work, especially unpaid labor, is considered essential to an education in humility, it is easy to use work to humiliate people supposedly for their own good. If people with addiction have an especially acute need for obedience, structure, humility, then forcing us to do menial labor in humiliating conditions can be presented as “treatment.” Reveal News exposed the exploitation of rehab patients by companies like Walmart, Shell and Exxon, under the aegis of the Cenikor Foundation: “Cenikor’s success is built on a simple idea: that work helps people recover from addiction. All participants have to do is surrender their pay to cover the costs of the two-year program.”

Workplace injuries and a death were only some of the resulting hardships, in what one former participant called “the closest thing to slavery.” The American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma filed suit in 2017 against what it called “human trafficking” at an alleged “unpaid labor camp dis-

guised as a rehabilitation center.” These cases are only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to punitive work at abusive rehabs and “teen treatment centers.”

Twelve-step traditions already include several elements that should militate against these abuses. Exploiting fellow sufferers is so far from the “eighth tradition” of freely-given service that its wrongness practically glows in the dark. But from a theological perspective, the more interesting way in which an orthodox understanding of A.A. *should* restrict abuse is in its understanding of hierarchy.

The primary hierarchy in a healthy A.A. group is the sponsor-sponsee relationship. A sponsor guides someone newer in sobriety through the 12 steps and provides ongoing guidance, support and (where appropriate) correction. This is the third way in which recovery culture can deepen a general rethinking of the nature of work. An overemphasis on autonomy can lead us to think that Christian theology supports what Americans mostly already believe: that power is good for us and greater control of our own lives should be our goal. Honoring autonomy rather than obedience will always mean bosses are more honorable than subordinates.

When A.A. is working right, not only do “subordinates” (sponsees) become “bosses” (sponsors). More importantly, they never stop being subordinates—to their own sponsors, to the program and fellowship of A.A., and above all to their Higher Power. It is this willingness to be sponsored that gives them authority. The goal is not to boss but to serve, and not to think like a boss but to continue to think like one under obedience. One cannot simultaneously serve and dominate; the ethic of surrender is a living critique of an economy based on competition for dominance. If only our own managers and corporate titans asked how they could serve the fellowship of workers and think like their lowest-paid employees.

And here we reach the final insight recovery culture can offer to Christian theology. We are made to share in divinity, to become what the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Bible (2 Pt 1:4) call “partakers of the divine nature.” Work can be part of our path to this communion. But it is not something we can build for ourselves. Even labor—our desire and ability to work and serve—is something we receive obediently from God. When we view work primarily as an imitation of or participation in God’s power, we risk forgetting our creaturehood. Work humbles us, and humble work is better for us, because our path of transformation not only passes through obedience but remains always within obedience.





If work provides structure and a chance to be of service, then any ‘post-work’ future must recognize and meet these needs.

Even in very early sobriety, people in Alcoholics Anonymous are encouraged to take on “service commitments.”

Jesus was a carpenter. He also knelt to wash his disciples’ feet. This, too, should be our ideal of work.

The Question of Policy

*I love people who...strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.*

—Marge Piercy, “To be of use”

Today people who do manual or service-industry work often view their jobs as shameful signs of personal failure. As Sarah Smarsh writes in her book, *Heartland*: “The worse danger is not the job itself but the devaluing of those who do it. A society that considers your body dispensable will inflict a violence upon you.” A.A. is a Möbius strip, where low-status jobs will always be high-status simply because they are humbling; but jobs requiring manual labor also carry a special honor in recovery culture. They are respected and they symbolize the hope that we can lead lives as clean and useful as a well-mopped bathroom.

All of this leads to questions of policy too big to tackle here. But the general aim of such policy should be to rescue the ideals of humility and gratitude from an American

culture that has turned these words into weapons used to keep working-class people from organizing or demanding change. There is no reason your humble service to the fellowship of labor should not come in a union.

But any policy will serve poor people and people who do grueling manual-labor jobs only if it is both drafted and implemented by people who believe poor people and laborers are exalted in God’s eyes. John Paul II pointedly criticized communism as an ideology “forswor[n]” by the working people of Solidarity for whom it “presumed to speak”—and like other modern popes, he was also quick to condemn liberal capitalism as an ideology that claimed to better workers’ lives while actually ignoring and degrading the image of God they bear. Every policy will become a weapon in the hands of the rich and the managers unless it is implemented by people for whom poor and working-class people are recognized as people participating in God’s work—for whom they, above all, are “essential workers.”

Eve Tushnet is the author of *Gay and Catholic: Accepting My Sexuality, Finding Community, Living My Faith and, most recently, the novel Punishment: A Love Story*.

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WHEN PERPETUAL ADORATION TAKES ON NEW MEANING

By Julia Walsh

For more than 141 years, since Aug. 1, 1878, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration have maintained the practice that gives us our name. Along with our lay prayer partners, one of us, at all times, has been praying before the consecrated host in our adoration chapel in La Crosse, Wis.

Our congregation has endured multiple challenges and transformations, and our practice of adoration has persisted. Prayer before the exposed Blessed Sacrament has lasted through fire and flood and through changes to our size, structure and form of life after the Second Vatican Council. At our peak size in 1962, we had 1,172 members. Today, we are at 185 members; only seven of us are younger than 50.

Recently, our practice changed in a way that goes to the heart of who we are. We ended the practice of adoring 24 hours a day. We now pray before the Blessed Sacrament from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. each day. Yet our tradition continues. We still practice perpetual adoration and our congregation's name still includes "Perpetual." But exactly what perpetual adoration means has taken on a new shape.

...

Some of my sisters say that this spiritual practice of perpetual adoration began before our founders immigrated from Bavaria to Wisconsin; adoration was a devotion in their parish of origin. Others say that the practice

began with a promise to Christ: The sisters asked for his intervention in helping them found their community in the United States and promised they would establish perpetual adoration when it came to fruition.

The practice of perpetual adoration has been for us as subtle as breathing, always in the background while we serve the people of God. In the past, we mainly served as teachers and nurses. Today, we minister in the fields of spirituality, social justice and parish ministry, along with education and health care. While sisters serve those in need, the constant prayer that has fed our mission and formed our identity persists.

As the ritual has traditionally taken place, at the start of each hour, a clock chimes and a shift of adorers revolves into the front row of chairs and ambos in our adoration chapel, deep inside St. Rose Convent. They recite prayers and bow before the white marble altar where a bejeweled monstrance is enthroned and surrounded by pink and gold Romanesque decor.

Above, an aging mural shows God the Father, the Holy Spirit and countless angels gesturing toward the Blessed Sacrament. For an hour, kneeling or sitting in the holy and silent space, enclosed under a domed ceiling painted dark blue and dotted with stars, the adorers pray for the inten-



Photo courtesy: Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration

Sister Eileen McKenzie carries the monstrance during a ceremony marking the transition in the congregation's adoration practice.

tions that have come to us from around the world.

Meanwhile, sisters ministering elsewhere stop by the motherhouse to adore the sacrament when possible.

Not long ago a friend asked me if I joined my community because of our practice of adoration. No, not really, I admitted. In fact, I was not familiar with the devotion before hearing of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. When I first learned about the devotion of the community, I was attracted to what the practice meant, not to the action itself. The sisters are prayerful, contemplative, steadfast, rooted and faithful. During my discernment, I learned our motto, “Modern Lives, Sacred Traditions,” and loved that the balance of prayer and service was central to the charism.

In my early 20s, I longed to pray with the sisters in their chapel in La Crosse, to try on their rhythms. Eventually, I felt at home in the communal practice of adoration, in the devotion and its meaning.

When I joined the order I was aware that what I was committing to was a life full of constant change, not stability. I knew I would move a lot and try several ministries. And I expected that the size and structure of my community life would be transformed, too. I dreaded the likelihood of needing to grieve a trail of sisters I love as they

went on to their eternal reward.

Somehow, though, I never considered that our adoration practice might need to change. In recent years, I became aware that it was growing increasingly difficult to have two adorers at every hour throughout the night. I could see that the circumstances were causing some challenges to my community, and I was concerned.

Yet, in mid-January when our congregation's president, Eileen McKenzie, F.S.P.A., announced that changes were going to be made to our practice of adoration, it felt like an earthquake. At the start of Lent, eucharistic adoration would no longer be “round the clock.” At 10 p.m. on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020, the tabernacle would be closed and adoration would pause until the next morning at 6 a.m.

We were told that there would be a special ritual to mark the moment the night before we changed our practice of perpetual adoration. Sisters, prayer partners, F.S.P.A. affiliates and staff were all invited to a special prayer service on Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2020.

When the time came for our adoration practice to shift during that last week of February, I was home alone. All the other sisters in the household went to La Crosse to physically participate in the historic moment while I remained in Chicago, living into my full and ordinary schedule of

ministry. I visited a jail, fed the homeless, met with spiritual directees, wrote a poem. With my sisters away, I was suddenly aware of the heaviness of grief. I was sluggish and teary. Sleep evaded me, and depression invaded. I had irrational doubts. I felt lonely, lost and uncertain.

As the time for the ritual approached, I realized I had a scheduling conflict. I wouldn't even be able to watch the livestream of the ritual as it was happening in La Crosse. I had a meeting with a directee until 6:15; the ritual was scheduled to start at 6.

After the appointment I rushed back to the convent where I live in Chicago and opened my laptop and tuned in, watching while I ate a supper of leftover salad. My sisters were lined up in the center aisle as in a Communion procession. At the front of the line, two sisters stood signing documents at two side-by-side podiums. It contained this promise:

*Accept my poor light;
It is the best I can give you now.
I, Sister —, promise to continue deepening my
adoration
to the extent possible as I fulfill my vows to you
to the end of my life.
With your Presence in my life,
I cultivate in my heart
as beautiful an abode for your Presence
as I am capable of doing.*

After the scroll was signed, the bishop of La Crosse, William Patrick Callahan, O.F.M.Conv., spoke eloquently about our Franciscan and eucharistic traditions. During the reposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the assembly sang "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee." Alone in the convent in Chicago, I sang along, although I wasn't feeling joyful. I felt far away.

The next day, Ash Wednesday, during a guided meditation, I visualized two hands. One hand was open wide, releasing what was beyond control. The other hand was closed in a fist, gripping and embracing reality. This is the simultaneous letting go and acceptance that is required of me as my community changes. It is a practice required of all who are disciples of Jesus Christ, a skill essential to the human condition.

On the night of Ash Wednesday, still alone in the Chicago convent, I entered into an hour of prayer to unite with those who I knew were praying in our adoration chapel in La Crosse. I prayed with my sadness. I prayed in the si-

lence. I wrote in my journal about letting go and accepting, about my Lenten intentions. I remembered that with God, time isn't linear. What if our sisters from yesteryear keep the night hours for us now? What if part of Franciscan Gospel living means embracing new understandings of our traditions?

And, had I been able to see two weeks into the future to the eruption of the coronavirus pandemic throughout the United States while I prayed alone that night, I might have marveled at the mystery of Providence, too. No one could have anticipated that by March 16, the entrance of lay prayer partners and sisters who reside outside of St. Rose Convent would be suspended indefinitely as a precautionary measure. Once it became clear that only the remaining 40 sisters who reside in St. Rose Convent would cover the 16 remaining adoration hour shifts each day, it would seem as if the Holy Spirit were looking out for us. The change was made at the right time.

Yes, it may seem like a stretch to some people for us to maintain the name "Perpetual" and yet not pray every hour of the day and night. As our community prepared for the transformation to our practice, I learned more about the meanings of the word "perpetual":

1. never ending or changing.
2. occurring repeatedly; so frequent as to seem endless and uninterrupted.
3. (of a plant) blooming or fruiting several times in one season.

I am encouraged by the permission we've received from the Vatican; we still are the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration.

On the first Friday night of Lent, two days after our practice of adoration was transformed, I was back in La Crosse. In my bedroom, praying around the midnight hour, I realized no one was in our chapel at the moment. I felt a subtle absence. I visualized the monstrance standing still and silent within the closed tabernacle, like being inside a silent cave. One hand open, one hand closed. I let go of the past and accepted the gift of a new reality.

Julia Walsh is a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Her work includes jail ministry, spiritual direction and peace and justice advocacy. Her writing can be found in The National Catholic Reporter, Living Faith and at MessyJesusBusiness.com. Twitter: @juliafspa.



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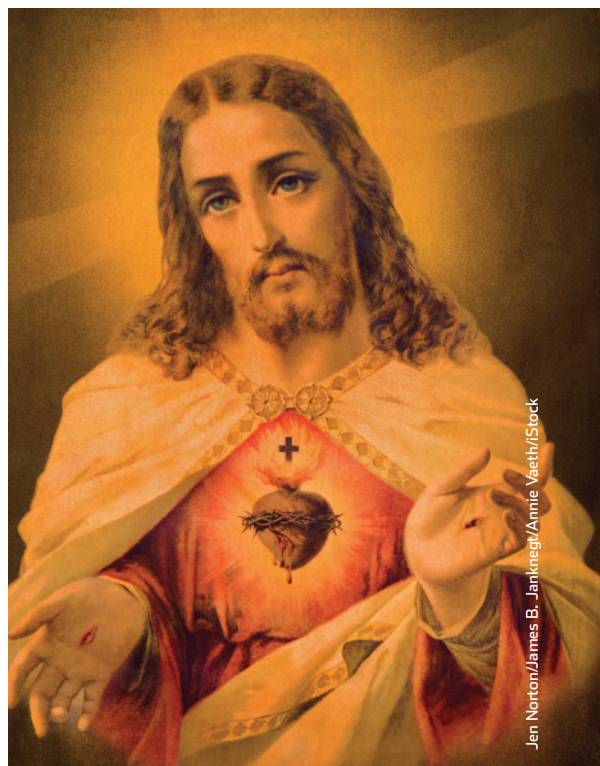
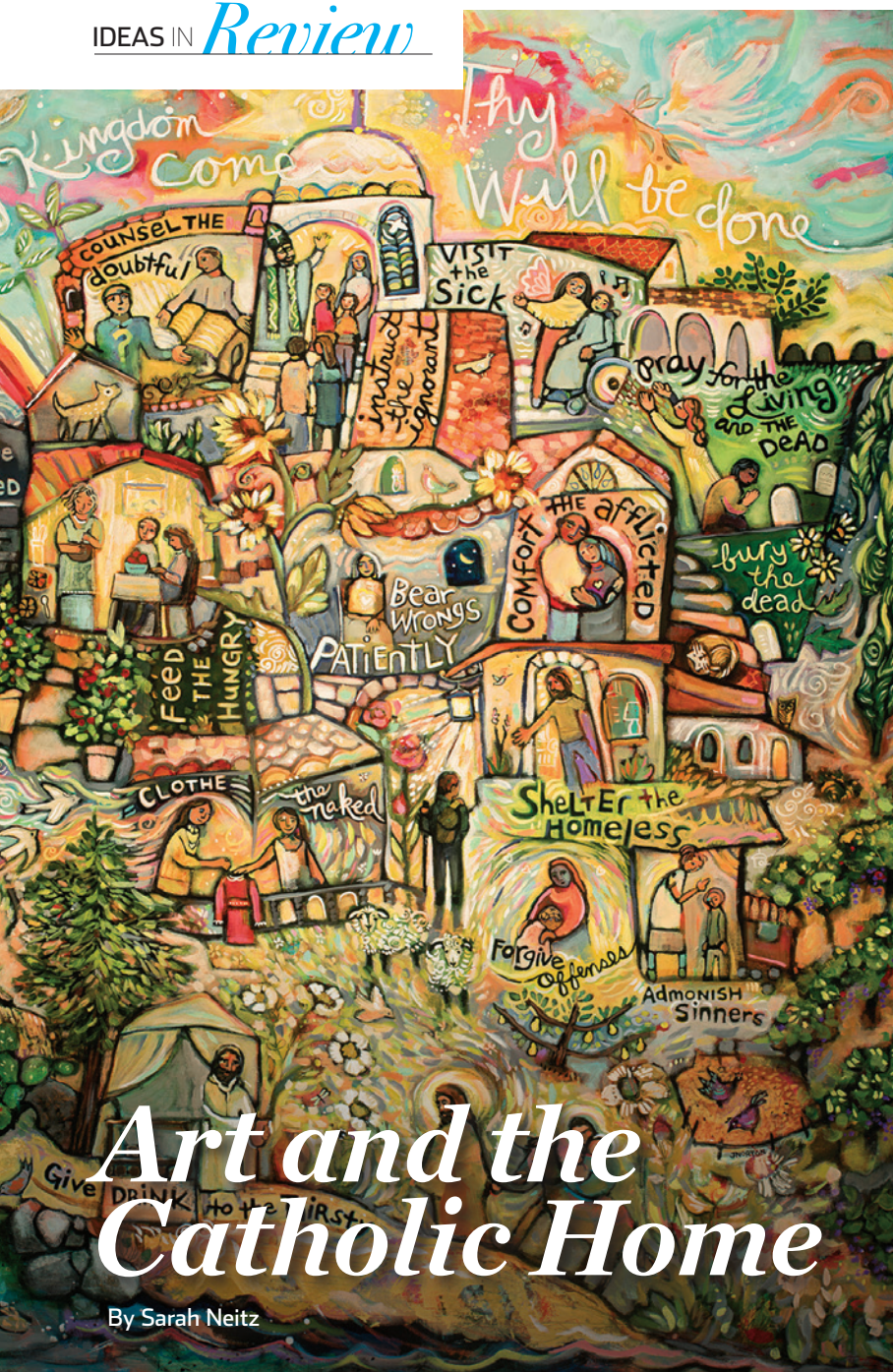
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LEADING THE CONVERSATION WHEREVER WE ARE, REACHING OUR AUDIENCE WHEREVER THEY ARE.



Art and the Catholic Home

By Sarah Neitz

About a year ago, I got married and moved in with my husband, and as we set up our apartment, one of the problems we faced was where to hang Creepy Jesus. If you grew up in a Catholic environment, you have seen Creepy Jesus before: the Sacred Heart of Jesus portrait, printed on cardboard with gold foil radiating from the

head of a white man with improbably enormous eyes. It is framed in plastic, and no matter where you hang it, the man's eyes follow you around the room, watching you compassionately as you cook dinner, read a book or fight with your husband.

My husband loves Creepy Jesus. His mother popped the image into

his car as he headed off to graduate school, joking that he should keep Jesus in the passenger seat. Since then, Creepy Jesus has hung in Sam's bedroom or living space. In this apartment, Creepy Jesus hung prominently over the couch. About two weeks after our honeymoon, we had some friends over and moving Creepy Jesus out of



Religious art shakes up class-based ideas about how our homes should look. From left, clockwise: “The Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy,” by Jen Norton; “The Visitation,” by James B. Janknegt; “Mary, Undoer of Knots,” by Annie Vaeth; and a traditional painting of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.



the living room became a priority for me. That was an image of me and my new marriage that I did not want to put in anyone’s head.

So, Sam and I set about trying to find a new place for Creepy Jesus. Sam suggested the bedroom. I suggested the pantry or the bathroom, but Sam did not agree. We tried him out by the front door for a few days, but that was alarming. Anywhere in the living or kitchen space in our small apartment would be sure to draw guests’ attention. We settled on the bedroom but positioned so that it wasn’t facing the bed and visitors couldn’t see it through the open door.


Sam found this whole process offensive and somewhat irreligious. What was my problem with this image? Why was I embarrassed about it?

This made me think of David Halle’s *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home* (1993). Halle is a sociologist who knocked on the doors of family homes and asked the residents to show him their art—prints and paintings on walls, sculptures in gardens or on side tables. He found that class explains a lot about where

people place art and what types of art they have.

This was particularly true about religious art. One of the groups Halle interviewed was working-class immigrants. These mostly Catholic respondents showed him statues of the Virgin Mary among their flowerbeds out front and prints of the Last Supper over their dining room tables. Much of the art in their homes was mass-produced, religious in nature and placed in both the public and private areas of their homes. In contrast, middle-class families who were religious rarely had religious art in the parts of their homes where they received guests—not in their living rooms, dining rooms or kitchens. If they did have religious art, they placed it in private areas—in their bedrooms or on the second floor, where only the more trusted guests would be welcome.

Halle’s book made me realize that my objection to Creepy Jesus had little to do with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and a lot to do with class. When thinking about where to hang this image, I thought immediately about what guests would think and what they would think of me. Would a guest feel unwelcome because of such a prominent image? Would people suspect that I secretly harbored a creepy, white, sentimentalized version of Catholicism? But now a new question came into my head: Should



Creepy Jesus now sits on a bookcase in my home office. And, yes, sometimes our guests jump when they encounter his soulful stare. ●●

my class decide where I put my faith in my home?

Taste in art, music, clothes, home décor and food usually feels very personal. But many of the wider patterns in how we interact with others and make distinctions in matters of taste have a lot to do with class—both the class I was born into and the class to which I aspire. Learning to distinguish between the 50-year-old French cabernet and Trader Joe's \$4 red blend is a class distinction as much as it is a matter of taste. Shopping at Trader Joe's instead of Walmart may well be a class distinction, for that matter! And religious art is much the same. Upon reflection, I realized that I do not own much religious art. The few pieces I do own, I have typically placed in my bedroom, where they cannot bother my housemates or guests.

When we talk about social life, we think about other people. But the environments we create are also an important part of how we enact our relationships with other people and ourselves. Our homes—the rooms, apartments, houses or acreage where we live—may be the most important environments for our social selves. We develop relationships with houses and with the things that we keep in

our homes. Tchotchkes and kitchen utensils physically remind us of our relationships with other people and help us to place ourselves socially. But when class is a primary consideration for what we put in our homes and where we put it, our homes recreate social boundaries instead of creating spaces of welcome and belonging.

We probably can't shake all our class tastes. These tastes inform our stories and help us to appreciate beauty in particular forms of art, music and décor. But we can take a moment to reflect on how our homes support our social selves. The art that is in your home can reinforce class, reminding you and the people you invite into your homes of where they should place you on the social ladder. Or the art in your home can remind you of other commitments and loves. Placing religious art throughout the home supports your faith commitments, reminding you that you belong to a community that transcends class.

Our homes are spaces where we feel most ourselves, but they are also spaces where we welcome other people. My class-based reaction assumed that I would invite non-Catholics and people who have complicated relationships with Catholicism into

our home. And this still seems an important consideration. I want to think about those guests and how they might interact with our home, too. But if this consideration leads me to create an idealized space, devoid of my faith life, then I am no longer inviting people into my home with the intention of hospitality.

Hospitality makes us vulnerable—we let a person see our most personal spaces, without knowing how they will react. Will they judge me for that dust bunny? Will they spill something on my couch? Will they smell bad or give me a cold? Hanging religious art shakes up class-based ideas about how my space should look, and it may make me feel vulnerable. But it also might be an opportunity for evangelization, to be curious and willing to talk with others about their spiritual journey, which is itself hospitable.

Creepy Jesus now sits on a bookcase in my home office. And, yes, sometimes our guests jump when they first encounter his soulful stare. We have also started to bring more religious images into our home. I am particularly fond of supporting artists currently making religious art, and supporting these artists is easier than it has ever been before. We have found

some amazing prints on Etsy, including a linocut of the classic Benedictine exhortation “Ora et Labora” and an image of Our Lady, Undoer of Knots, who hangs out in my yarn stash. We have also included some images that remind us of our values, even though they aren’t religious, like the Syracuse Cultural Workers’ “How to Build Community” poster. Looking for religious art inspires me and can be like a prayer. I never could have imagined the beautiful and challenging images that artists are making.

I have always been impressed that many of the Gospel stories show Jesus doing very simple things that others find challenging and even threatening. Jesus sits at the wrong end of a table, says hello to a man up in a tree, talks with women, accepts gifts, touches sick people. He shows us that simple acts erase social hierarchies, giving a sign of the kingdom of God.

Creepy Jesus challenged my sense of what was tasteful and appropriate, and maybe that’s just what Jesus Christ would want. Hanging art can be a simple act to challenge class-based understandings of the role of religion in everyday life. By bringing religious art into the public spaces of our homes, we remind ourselves of the centrality of faith in our lives and share the best parts of ourselves with our guests.

Sarah Neitz is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Notre Dame and a former member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps. She researches art and social change.

Premonition

By Therese Gleason

I didn’t know why
I stopped at the chapel
that afternoon, the sun
hitting me between the eyes
as I entered the cool quiet.

I got on my knees
and prayed while the wax dripped
down the cheeks of the Madonna,
candles sputtering weakly.

I knelt for some time,
a prodigal daughter returned at last
to the arms of the father.

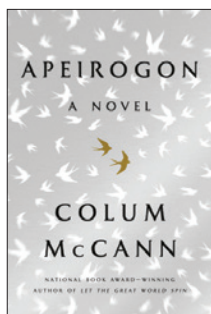
Then came the call;
I smelled ashes and the cloying rot
of Easter lilies on the altar—
their cut green stalks gasping,
their white trumpets ablaze,
summoning the angels.

Therese Gleason’s *chapbook*, *Libation*, was co-winner of the South Carolina Poetry Initiative Chapbook Competition. Her work has appeared in *Limestone*, *Plainsongs*, *The Worcester Review*, and is forthcoming in the *New Ohio Review*.

The infinitive perspectives of Colum McCann's fiction

By Kevin Spinale

AP Photo/Max Nash



Apeirogon
By Colum McCann
Random House
480p \$28

Birds clearly mesmerize novelist Colum McCann. They are an enthralling mixture of delicateness and durability, fragility and resilience. In flight, they embody freedom. Though they linger in the air almost effortlessly, they have to come back to the ground or a crag in a rock to rest. Even the frigate bird, which appears in print and picture toward the beginning of McCann's new novel, *Apeirogon*, will have to return to dry land at some point after gliding for months at a time while pillaging food from other birds. The sheer creaturely variety

of birds, from ortolans to falcons, is mesmerizing.

In a core section of *Let the Great World Spin*, McCann's National Book Award-winning novel set in New York in 1974, a woman shown circling the base of one of the Twin Towers and picking up the corpses of small birds who, dazed by the lights of the towers, had crashed headlong into them. As Philippe Petit—himself spritely and birdlike—approaches the towers to survey the area before his daring tightrope walk between them, the woman hands him a feather from a black-throated warbler. The feather will remind Petit of his own creaturely fragility, the consequence of his fall should he make a mistake.

Petit appears in *Apeirogon* as well, walking out over the Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem in May 1987. Petit sought to unite Israel and Palestine for a moment by his performance. In the middle of the wire, he intended to release

a white dove—a pigeon really—as a symbol of peace. When freed from a pocket in his billowing costume while he was midway across the valley, the bird would not fly away. It first perched on Petit's head, then on the end of his balancing bar. The bird almost upended Petit. It finally flew away to great cheers from the crowd. Petit righted himself and made it to the other side of the valley without falling. No one falls halfway.

Just before the two narrative sections at the heart of *Apeirogon*, McCann describes Constantin Brâncuși's famous bird sculptures as some of the most beautiful artworks of the 20th century. The sculptures depict the elongated body of a bird in flight, shorn of wings. McCann tells the novel's readers that Brâncuși's sculptures were impounded by U.S. customs in the 1920s because they resembled machine-made artifacts and should have been taxed as such when they

The French high wire artist Philippe Petit released a dove about halfway between the Jewish and the Arab sectors of Jerusalem, May 18, 1987.

entered the United States for an art show. Shorn of wings, the sculptures looked like precursors to the body of an aeronautically advanced plane. As pieces of art, critics thought they “left far too much to the imagination.”

The core of *Apeirogon* is constructed like Brâncuși’s bird sculptures. The novel’s body is wrought from two stories of fathers whose daughters die in savage acts of violence in Israel and Palestine. These two accounts of loss are the hitch and anchor for the coincidences and intersections of legend, war and history of the Levant.

The book’s two wings of 499 sections spreading out from the detailed accounts of the fathers are themselves extended outward in stories of deep irony, portraits of terror, tales of obfuscation and of human genius, intricate catalogs of creatures, genealogies of armaments and depictions of human goodness. The book’s two swaths of story and snapshot, one that counts up and one that counts down, on either side of the core become the fragile yet intricately beautiful wings that keep the two fathers, Rami and Bassam, aloft throughout this novel. The sections of story on either side fan out and cover the gamut of elemental human experience: music, sound, stone, water, time, family, homeland, bone, war and memory.

There is a wonderful symmetry and repetition in each of the wings conjoined to and anchored in the lives of Rami and Bassam—stories that these men tell together for two reasons: to honor the memory of their daughters, Smadar and Abir, and to work toward peace. Their daughters were likewise durable yet fragile crea-

tures. They were caught in the utterly complex network of history and violence that is Israel and Palestine from the time of the British Mandate through today.

Smadar is the daughter of a prominent Israeli academic, Nurit, and Rami, a force of a man who describes himself as a seventh-generation Jerusalemite and a “graduate of the Holocaust.” Smadar was blown up in a suicide bombing at the intersection of Ben Hilel and Ben Yehuda Streets in Jerusalem in 1997. She was a few days short of her 14th birthday. Abir, the daughter of the Palestinians Salwa and Bassam, was killed by a rubber bullet fired from an Israeli patrol vehicle in 2007. She was on recess from school in the West Bank village of Anata and had just purchased a candy bracelet. She was 10 years old. The rubber bullet hit her in the back of her head.

If one reads *Apeirogon* in public—on a train or in an airport—there will be points during the novel when the reader might want to quickly lift his or her eyes up off the text to stop from weeping openly. The stories of these two girls and their families are powerful and heartbreaking. That is exactly what a good novel should do: move its readers and change them, help readers understand that the conflict in Israel and Palestine is not an aporia but an apeirogon—that is, a polygon with a “countably infinite number of sides.”

There seems to be a countably infinite number of characters and cameos in *Apeirogon*. Einstein and Freud, Borges and Mahmoud Darwish, Sinéad O’Connor and Senator George Mitchell all appear. But the most influential character may be a book and the nature of that book’s stories. In

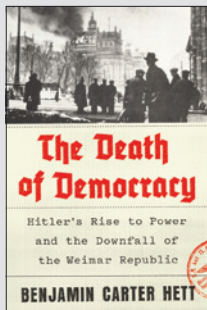
the 19th century, a British soldier and explorer, Sir Richard Francis Burton, who also appears in Borges’s “Aleph,” translated *Arabian Nights* into English. The 1,001 tales inspire the structure of McCann’s work.

Burton’s strange biography and journey to Mecca take up a few of the sections in the opening span of *Apeirogon*. On the other side of Rami and Bassam’s core stories, as McCann’s section numbers count downward, there is the tale of Wael Zuaiter’s assassination by the Mossad in Rome a few months after 11 Israeli Olympians were killed in Munich in 1972. Zuaiter was translating *One Thousand and One Nights* into Italian. As McCann writes, “Twelve of the bullets hit him in the head and chest. The thirteenth entered [his copy of *One Thousand and One Nights*] still in his pocket, ripped through the stories, and stopped when it hit the spine.”

Rami and Bassam’s experiences are the spine of McCann’s novel, and they are committed to stopping the violence that swirls around them.

There is a close symmetry in the grief of these two fathers who come from seemingly different worlds, certainly different sides of an intense conflict. The novel itself soars with symmetry and meaning because it is propelled by the elemental human experiences of love and hate, bellicosity and a yearning for peace.

Kevin Spinale, S.J., is a doctoral candidate in English education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and is the moderator of the Catholic Book Club.



The Death of Democracy

By Benjamin Carter Hett

Henry Holt and Co.
304p \$30

Paving the way to their own ruin

If the object of learning history is indeed to avoid repeating it, there can be few histories more worth knowing than that of Hitler's rise to power. As Americans debate far-right movements, weakened political institutions and even what exactly constitutes a "concentration camp," the question of just how the Weimar Republic became the Third Reich is more relevant than ever.

For those looking to understand how a flawed but genuine democracy could give way to the vilest regime imaginable, Benjamin Carter Hett's *The Death of Democracy: Hitler's Rise to Power and the Downfall of the Weimar Republic* provides a solid foundation. Hett does an admirable job explaining the actions of leading figures of the Weimar era based on what they knew then. One can almost begin to see the logic behind some of the decisions key players made, even while knowing where they eventually will lead.

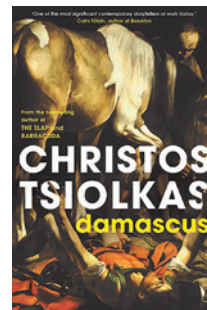
It goes without saying this is not comforting reading. There are many parallels to U.S. politics, often where least expected. Conservative elites who thought they could use the Nazis to their own ends—for German rearmament, for example—emerge as perhaps the clearest facilitators of Hitler's rise. But the left, with its

tendency toward factionalism, is also implicated. Among the most tragically shortsighted decisions in a book full of them is the German Communist Party's decision to identify the Social Democratic Party, not the Nazis, as their main enemy. Once a critical mass of the left had abandoned a commitment to democracy, the center could not hold against the far right.

The most striking revelation for me in the book was how progressive the Weimar Republic was. This was a model democracy, with a constitution that included proportional representation. Berlin was a diverse city, a capital of culture and leftist politics. A movement for L.G.B.T. rights in Weimar Germany was decades ahead of similar movements in the United States. And though most Germans shared grievances with the Nazis over the Treaty of Versailles, it was not inevitable that another war would break out over them. Some, like Foreign Minister Gustav Stresemann, believed that diplomacy and European integration were the best way to advance German aims. What might have been had Weimar democracy been allowed to grow up?

Yet it was not to be. Hett's book ultimately paints a dispiriting portrait of a doomed democracy, under siege from all sides. The one thing that can be said in defense of the Weimar Germans is that they did not know how bad it could get.

Antonio De Loera-Brust is a first-generation Mexican-American writer and filmmaker from Davis, Calif., and a former Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., fellow at *America*.



Damascus

By Christos Tsiolkas
Allen & Unwin

440p \$24.64

Beauty in a corrupt world

Christos Tsiolkas's *Damascus* brings us into a violent, miserable, fallen world. The Australian author's most recent novel repeatedly paints deeply disturbing scenes of bodies ruined, defiled, broken and raped in revenge, sacrifice, lust and hatred. It is visceral and vivid; it is the reality in which Paul the Apostle lived, and it is terrifying.

The world of the first century is the terrible canvas through which moments of light and beauty cut. In speculative narratives about Paul, Lydia of Thyatira, Timothy (Paul's collaborator and co-worker) and Thomas, we are offered respite in moving visions of two intertwined concepts central to the emerging faith: love and equality in Christ. Perhaps Tsiolkas sets out to contrast these so intensely against their historical background because we moderns cannot grasp how earth-shattering they were.

Tsiolkas depicts acts of profound kindness and love toward the most marginalized individuals in the first decades after the death of Christ, but it is the love shared among the followers of Jesus, both the apostles and later generations, that is most richly developed in *Damascus*. They are lovers and they are loved, and our culture would be inclined to read their relationships here as almost romantic.

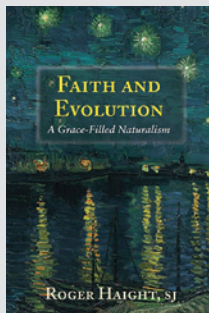
The love represented is sometimes *eros*, need-love, desire for the beloved, yes. But it is *eros* on the road to *agape*—love that is self-giving.

In a moment of deep insight, Tsiolkas imagines for us what it might have been like to mark oneself as we now so perfunctorily do—to make the sign of the cross—in a world in which “the ancient humiliation,” “those abominable gallows,” the ignoble and brutal act of crucifixion, was a lived reality.

To sit together, as Lydia does in Philippi, with merchants and slaves, Jews and Gentiles, men and women—and to participate as equals in the eucharistic memorial, a simple act of table fellowship—was to tear the world apart. To propose that all might be equal in Christ, that all human life might be inviolable and sacred and worthy of love, was to present a radically subversive alternative.

Tsiolkas is neither a theologian nor a biblical scholar, nor does he present himself as one, but he has read widely and seriously. He has described his fiction as “heretical, but not blasphemous.” He is a novelist, and first and foremost he is himself: a man who knows what it is to struggle in and against the world. With *Damascus*, Tsiolkas has recovered for himself and his readers a message that would seem universal in time if we were not acquainted with its origins and emergence, its breaking into history: that for all the ugliness of a corrupted world, there is still to be found within it truth, goodness and beauty.

Ben Wilkie is a historian and freelance writer based in Victoria, Australia.



Faith and Evolution
By Roger Haight, S.J.
Orbis Books
264p \$30

Spiritual discernments

Roger Haight’s newest book, *Faith and Evolution*, asks: “Can a conversation with science, especially with evolution...reveal more clearly the logic of Christian faith and its relationship to the method and understanding produced by the sciences?” Haight’s answer is a qualified yes—and the success of his project correlates to how he arrives at that conclusion.

This is a book of systematic theology, not religious or scientific history; thus, while Darwin is mentioned from time to time, the historical debates and theological gyrations of the late 19th and early 20th century after his *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871) make no appearance in *Faith and Evolution*. For Haight, the core of the project is to ask “what science can teach Christian theologians about our own self-understanding” and to offer a vision of possible compatibility to Christians who “either do not know how to process their Christian faith in this context or call it into question altogether.”

The focus on evolution in the book’s title is significant, and it is also a placeholder. The dramatic, open-system logic that now characterizes the contemporary sciences is perhaps best communicated by the Darwinian revolution. But also at

play in this book are cosmology and astrophysics and the phenomena of causality, emergence and complexity in numerous material domains, as well as the experience of human consciousness.

Undergirding the analyses throughout the book is a “negative” normativity, a principle stating that “theology cannot deny what is commonly taken as established scientific conclusions about reality and retain its credibility.” Readers looking for a “warfare” model for the relationship between theology and science will have to look elsewhere. “Science should not be regarded as an enemy of theology but as a friend and ally,” writes Haight. The question is how theology can be responsive to scientific realities while also retaining its distinctive integrity.

The book is characteristically careful, methodical and precise—hallmarks of Haight’s writing style and theological methodology. For one semester in graduate school, I had the pleasure of learning from Father Haight in a classroom. Like generations of his students, I learned from him to appreciate the art of a concise one-page argument and his surreptitious, wry humor (he refers to his own analysis in Chapter 8 as a “brief, abstract, and overly dense representation”). But perhaps the longest-lasting spiritual lesson I took from him appears in the pages of this book too: “If knowing were not oriented to human action, it is hard to imagine what else it would be for.”

Christiana Zenner is an associate professor of theology, science and ethics at Fordham University in New York.

Preaching liberty, practicing oppression

By Rob Weinert-Kendt

In HBO's "The Plot Against America," John Turturro plays Rabbi Bengelsdorf, who forms a mutually beneficial alliance with President Charles Lindbergh.

Authors tend to disavow accusations of allegory, as if it would reduce their achievement if we were to read their fictions as mere flipbooks of connect-the-dot analogies. Thus Philip Roth rebuffed those who read his brilliant 2004 novel *The Plot Against America*, which imagined 1940s-era Americans turning to fascism rather than fighting it, as a veiled critique of the Bush administration.

Reality may have caught up to Roth's imagination. There are moments in the beautifully made new HBO miniseries adaptation from David Simon ("The Wire," "The Deuce") that pop out with vivid Trump-era correlatives: The surprise election of a media celebrity horrifies one population, while cheering and validating another. Next comes a gradual normalization as the economy booms and many holdouts give up their resistance, even as the new administration takes drastic steps, like relocating vulnerable populations and cozying up to

foreign dictators. Openly racist speech and outright violence surge, clearly emboldened by the new regime, which pointedly fails to condemn them.

The story is viewed through the lens of one middle-class family in Newark's Jewish neighborhood, based closely on Roth's own. The lives of the insurance-salesman dad Herman (Morgan Spector), the housewife mom Bess (Zoe Kazan), the adolescent Sandy (Caleb Malis), and the wide-eyed, 9-year-old Philip (Azhy Robertson) follow reassuring household rhythms, until they are disrupted by events that first unfold through their radio, then spill into their very dining room. When Republicans nominate the young, charismatic aviation hero Charles Lindbergh to run against Roosevelt in 1940—at a time when the real-life Lindbergh was the public face of the America First movement, which was explicitly isolationist and more-than-implicitly anti-Semitic—the Jews of Newark react with open disgust and dismay.

That is, all except Bess's social-climbing sister Evelyn (Winona Ryder) and Rabbi Bengelsdorf (John Turturro), who form a mutually beneficial alliance with the new regime: In return for positions of power and prominence, they effectively inoculate the administration against charges of anti-Semitism. "He's koshering Lindbergh," says Alvin (Anthony Boyle), Philip's prematurely jaded cousin, of a patriotic radio speech by Bengelsdorf.

Like the novel, the show unfolds with eerie plausibility and almost unbearable suspense. Rooted in warm-toned mid-20th-century realism, the series is stronger in the domestic register than the world-historical one. Whereas Roth's novel renders the events of his imagined history in long passages of masterful pseudo-scholarship, the series mostly conjures world developments by newsreel and radio. Still, this is true to one of the novel's main points: that history unfolds in living rooms as much as on

battlefields.

The cast is uniformly excellent: Turturro is a sneaky showboater as the rationalizing rabbi, and Ryder makes a touchingly brittle accomplice. As the patriarch under-pressure, Spector captures the way his character's paternal warmth and fierce integrity are inseparable from his stubbornness and temper, while Kazan, a reliable emotional barometer of any scene she's in, emerges as the show's moral center, holding her small brood together against enemies both foreign and domestic.

The moments that may hit hardest as the series progresses—and as our nation and world head into a pandemic crisis as tectonic and generation-defining as World War II—are those in which the young actors look longingly, even fearfully, to their parents for guidance or explanation, as if their minds are racing and their innocent eyes are asking: Is this how the world is going to be from now on?

One powerful and damning subtext of “The Plot Against America” is that the United States has long been home as much to oppression as to liberty, the internment of Japanese Americans being just one example from the same period. We may not need a book or TV show to remind us that in a sense, all of this has already happened here, and may happen again. But sometimes fiction is the best way to tell the truth. And sometimes imagining a different past, even a dystopian one, can help us imagine a better future.

Rob Weinert-Kendt is an arts journalist and editor of *American Theatre* magazine.

Max von Sydow beyond ‘The Exorcist’

In his review of “The Exorcist” in December 1973, the film critic Roger Ebert found the casting of Max von Sydow, who played the aged Jesuit Father Lankester Merrin, to be an inevitable choice. “[Mr. von Sydow] almost seems to belong on a theological battlefield the way John Wayne belonged on a horse,” wrote Ebert.

Born in Sweden, Mr. von Sydow, who died this year on March 8, made a storied career portraying various characters of faith. But it was his 11-film collaboration with director Ingmar Bergman, whose decades-long cinematic interrogation of the divine and stark depiction of faith earned him worldwide acclaim, that established Mr. von Sydow as the embodiment of the Christian struggle and a conduit for Bergman's restless inquiring.

Three films Mr. von Sydow made with Bergman—“The Seventh Seal,” “The Virgin Spring” and “Winter Light”—find him wrestling with God and swinging like a pendulum between doubt and belief. Trailed by death and tormented by doubts regarding God's existence, Mr. von Sydow, as the 14th-century knight Antonius Block, searches for answers while simultaneously rejecting God in the art-house classic, “The Seventh Seal.”

“Why does He remain a mocking reality that I cannot shake off?” asks Block, unwittingly confessing to

death personified. In “Winter Light,” Bergman depicts an isolated pastor (Gunnar Björnstrand) whose attempt to counsel Jonas (von Sydow), a depressed parishioner obsessed with the threat of nuclear annihilation, completely fails as the pastor airs his own doubts about God and Jonas later commits suicide.

In one of his greatest performances, Mr. von Sydow is the masculine, commanding Töre in “The Virgin Spring,” which stirred controversy upon its release and won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film in 1961. Having killed three people in revenge for his daughter's murder, Töre (von Sydow) stares at his hands and, wracked with guilt, begins to weep. Brooding, interior and utterly focused, he is a stirring presence on screen, with a weathered face apt to illustrate inner spiritual turmoil.

Mr. von Sydow was raised Lutheran, but by the 1970s had come to consider himself agnostic. Still, he did not rule out the possibility of life after death. In a 2012 interview, he stated that Bergman, who died in 2007, promised to visit him after his death to prove the reality of an afterlife. “Well, I've heard from Bergman many times,” he said.

Ryan Di Corpo, *Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., fellow.*



Max von Sydow in Los Angeles, Oct. 2, 1982
AP Photo/Wally Fong, File

Suffering and Endurance

Readings: Acts 2:36-41; Ps 23; 1 Pt 2:20-25; Jn 10:1-10

As we continue through the Easter season, today's readings illuminate the implications and salvation that come from Christ's suffering on the cross. As we continue to suffer hardships related to Covid-19, the readings offer guidance to help us endure during this difficult time.

In the Gospel from John, Jesus teaches using a metaphorical short story. He compares his followers to sheep and himself to a gate that protects them. Jesus characterizes himself as a barrier against corruption and an entryway to salvation and eternal life: "I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly." As the passage continues, Jesus also calls himself the good shepherd who sacrifices his life for his sheep.

The first reading from Acts provides directives for what Christ's flock should do: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Belief in salvation through Christ's death and resurrection is connected with personal responsibility and ritual action. Repentance requires an acknowledgement of failings, an openness to forgiveness and a commitment to reform. Baptism provides a cleansing of sin and initiation into the community. These actions prepare converts physically and spiritually to encounter God through the Holy Spirit. At this point in Acts, the apostles have already received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Today's reading depicts Peter inviting converts into the community of faith and affirming the ability of all people to receive the Holy Spirit.

The second reading from 1 Peter reflects on the suffering that can come with being in the Christian community. The text is part of a passage, starting at 1 Pt 2:18, that has unfortunately been used to justify slavery, a reading that must be condemned as it supports an immoral institution. Read properly, the second reading can provide some level of comfort during a time of suffering by offering Christ's suffering as a model. The agony that Christ felt while being crucified illustrates the power of endurance. Even as Christ suffered an unjust crucifixion, he endured this treatment and did not retaliate against

You have been called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps. (1 Pt 2:21)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What can you do to endure during periods of suffering?

How can you support people who face challenges and hardships?

If you are suffering, do you recognize and reach out to people for support?

those who caused him pain. Like John, 1 Peter incorporates the sheep and shepherd metaphors to explain how Christ suffers for his flock.

Over these recent months, we have seen many people suffering and dying because of Covid-19, and many others face the less visible suffering of isolation, anxiety and poverty. We can find some comfort in 1 Peter and try to endure our collective pain following the model of Christ, not retaliating against one another but instead facing our challenges while working for the common good. Also, we should always remember that many people around the world have suffered and continue to suffer forms of injustice and oppression not connected to this virus. Our gaze is rightfully focused on Covid-19. But we must not forget the marginalized and poor who have already been suffering and often bear a disproportionate share of this crisis. Following Christ requires us to maintain a commitment to all people, especially those most in need.

Faith Requires Service

Readings: Acts 6:1-7; Ps 33; 1 Pt 2:4-9; Jn 14:1-12

Our readings today help us understand how Jesus' works are the works of the Father and how disciples of Christ are called to share in and continue this work, by serving one another as representatives of God.

In today's Gospel, John describes Jesus speaking with the apostles about his relationship to the Father. As the apostles seek understanding, Jesus articulates in multiple ways how he is related to the Father. Jesus affirms their connection by saying: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This assertion might suggest that Jesus is only a conduit to connect to the Father. But Jesus further explains that the Father is in him and he is in the Father. Moreover, all of Jesus' actions are works of the Father. These actions include the powerful signs that frame John's Gospel (e.g., healing the man born blind, raising Lazarus) as well as his crucifixion and resurrection. The relationship between the persons of the Trinity would be formally expressed at the Councils of Nicea and Constantinople in the fourth century. Today's Gospel provides some of the biblical evidence for understanding the relationship between the persons of the Trinity.

Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones.
(Jn 14:12)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What actions can you take to serve your community?

How does the Holy Spirit empower you for holiness and service?

Who inspires your life?

It is important that John connects belief in Jesus to Christian mission, saying, "Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones." Foundational to Christian faith is the requirement for believers to serve one another as an expression of their belief in God. The first and second readings provide examples of Christian faith in action.

In Acts, Luke describes a conflict over the allocation of food to widows. Widows were among the most vulnerable in society, often lacking support or access to economic independence. In the legal and prophetic texts of the Old Testament, widows are regularly mentioned with orphans as two groups of people who should receive particular care (e.g., Ex 22:22; Is 1:17). In the first reading, seven reputable community members who are "filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom" are appointed to oversee the proper distribution of food. These people are models for all who are called to live out faith in Christ. The second reading from 1 Peter echoes this, calling believers to holiness by creating a community founded on Christ's life and love.

One excellent model of that call to faith and service is celebrated one day before this Sunday. May 9 is the feast of St. Louise de Marillac, who devoted her life to the care of others, especially people who were poor, sick and most vulnerable, caring for them in their homes and in hospitals. St. Louise imitated Christ through her works. Likewise, she wisely realized that service needed to go beyond her life. She organized women in her community, co-founding the Daughters of Charity with St. Vincent de Paul. Today, these women continue St. Louise's legacy and mission by serving worldwide, providing care to people with various challenges, including sick and aging populations, migrants, people with disabilities and addictions and people living in poverty. Today's readings inspire us to live selflessly and look for models like St. Louise to inspire our faith and work.

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Becoming a Jesuit

On leaving politics for more direct service

By Cyrus Habib



On March 19, I announced that I will not be running for re-election as Washington State's lieutenant governor and have decided to enter the Society of Jesus. This decision followed two years of careful and prayerful discernment.

I was elected as state representative in 2012, state senator in 2014 and lieutenant governor in 2016. My reasons for running for those positions and my priorities in office were firmly rooted in Catholic social teaching, which places the poor, the sick, the disabled, the immigrant, the prisoner and all who are marginalized at the center of our social and political agenda. I knew from childhood what it was like to be excluded for being a blind kid from an Iranian family, and I have tried to use the power I have been given by the voters to ensure that we move toward that day when no one will feel left behind or left out in our society.

But over the past couple of years, I have felt a calling to dedicate my life in a more direct and personal way to serving the marginalized, empowering the vulnerable, healing those who suffer from spiritual wounds and accompanying those discerning their own futures. This is rooted in my faith in Christ's Gospel, but my desire to encounter something greater than myself by walking with the poor and abandoned will be familiar to those of many different spiritual traditions. I have come to

believe that the best way to deepen my commitment to social justice is to reduce the complexity in my own life and dedicate it to serving others.

People are in dire need of spiritual support and companionship. From our throwaway culture, which treats workers and our environment as disposable, to a new generation of young people eager to change the world but struggling with unprecedented anxiety, alienation and other mental health challenges, to the fear and isolation we are all experiencing as a result of the coronavirus—this is a time when we need to ground ourselves in the wisdom of those who came before and cultivate new forms of wisdom forged in the fires of our present moment.

The Catholic Church has wrestled with difficult social and moral questions for 2,000 years, and while I can be as impatient as anyone when it moves too slowly, I know from personal experience how much we can all benefit from a moral vocabulary that insists on the dignity of each and every person. I also know that in this time of consumerism, distrust and polarization, many Americans are longing for an encounter with the transcendent, the joyful, the loving.

I experience that consolation myself every time I speak with my role model, the Rev. Mike Ryan, the pastor of St. James Cathedral in Seattle. And because God is big enough to speak to

us through many different traditions, I felt it when I had the privilege of meeting with and learning from the Dalai Lama last year.

Jesuits are known for their commitment to education, for their philosophy of finding God in all people, cultures and things, and for their advocacy for a more inclusive church and world. At this point, it is too early for me to know where my life as a Jesuit will take me, but I am confident that it will involve teaching, intercultural and interfaith dialogue, advocacy and spiritual accompaniment.

I want to thank all who made it possible for me to serve the public in elected office—all the volunteers, donors, staff and colleagues who have accompanied me on this journey. I treasure our shared accomplishments more than I could possibly reduce to writing here. Elected office and government service are deeply noble pursuits, and the people I have worked with have only deepened my respect for our form of government. Thank you for what you have done and what you will continue to do for our country.

I ask you all to keep me in your prayers as I travel this new road; you will of course be in mine.

Cyrus Habib is the lieutenant governor of Washington State.

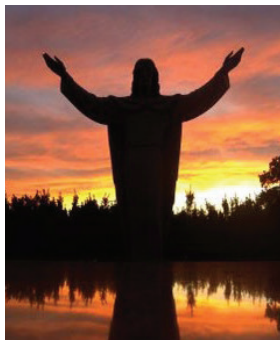
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FINALIST: FORWARD REVIEWS MYSTERY OF THE YEAR

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